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IMPORTANT NEWS ABOUT WILLS

CR Consumer Reports®

JULY 2022

RATINGS & REVIEWS

- Mattresses
- Dishwashers
- Smart Speakers
- Air Purifiers
- Washing Machines
- Lawn Mowers

Save More Waste Less

HOME EDITION

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CRM27C2

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ABOUT CONSUMER REPORTS
Consumer Reports is an independent, nonprofit organization founded in 1936 that works side by side with consumers to create a safe, fair, and transparent marketplace. To achieve our mission, we test thousands of products and services in our labs each year and survey hundreds of thousands of consumers about their experiences with products and services. We pay for all the products we rate. We don't accept paid advertising.

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—Jacqueline Felicetti

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Greener Choices Ahead

OUR WORK BEGINS by listening to you. That's why we've increased our coverage of sustainability issues, so you'll know more about products and services that don't harm your health or the environment.

Since 2009, CR has surveyed hundreds of thousands of consumers on environmental issues, and our January 2022 nationally representative survey revealed that 72 percent of you believe your actions can help protect the planet, with a majority saying you'd purchased various types of eco-friendly products, including efficient appliances.

People want choices that fit their lifestyles, values, and budgets. It's why we created CR's Green Choice designation, so you can learn which vehicles produce the cleanest emissions and which washing machines use less water and energy. And it's why this month's cover story, "Save More, Waste Less" (on page 22), focuses on sustainable options around your home that will also help cut costs.

Personal actions matter, but a clear majority of Americans agree that businesses and government must also play a role in creating systemic change–and CR is pushing to make that happen. Recent CR testing exposed the amount of dangerous PFAS chemicals in food containers, and after learning about our investigation, several companies publicly committed to reducing the amount of PFAS in their packaging. In addition, we organized thousands of consumers to urge the Environmental Protection Agency to limit truck and bus pollution and submitted recommendations for new emissions standards. And CR will soon release the largest survey to date on electric vehicles and low-carbon fuels.

Together, we will strengthen our consumer-powered movement to improve the marketplace for both people and the planet.

Marta Tellado

Marta L. Tellado,
President and CEO
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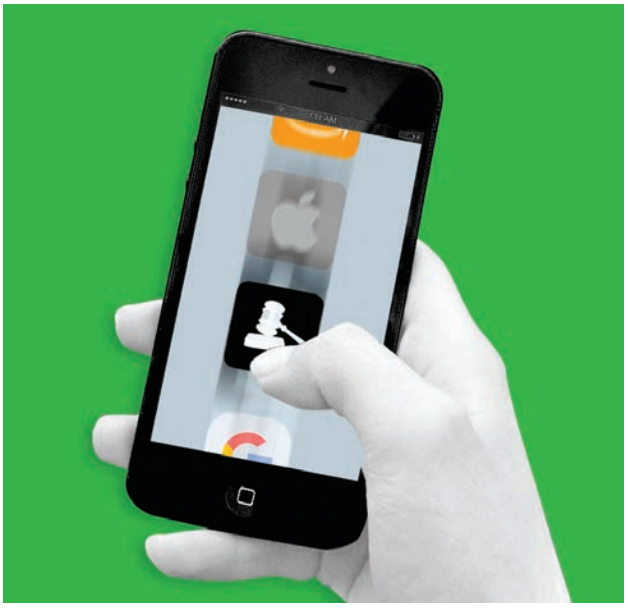

Making Online Markets Fairer

To be fair and effective, a marketplace must give all buyers and sellers, products and services, information and ideas an equal opportunity to thrive. But that's not always the case in the digital world, where a few corporate behemoths increasingly dominate the exchange of goods, services, and information.

In fact, consumers are deeply troubled by current market conditions: Roughly 3 out of 4 Americans worry about the power wielded by the biggest tech companies, according to a 2020 nationally representative CR survey of 3,219 U.S. adults.

That's why CR is advocating for two bills that would limit the companies' power, introduce more competition and consumer choice, and lower prices. One is the American Innovation and Choice Online Act, which would prevent tech platforms from giving preference to their own products and services over those of competitors. Google couldn't make its own airline flight search results more prominent than Kayak's, for example.

The other is the Open App Markets Act, which, among other things, would make it easier to switch between Apple and Android phones, and to choose default apps for smartphone functions such as email, web search, and "smart" voice assistants.

81%

of Americans feel it's a problem that online platforms have become so large and powerful.

Both bills have passed the Senate Judiciary Committee with large, bipartisan majorities. To urge full passage, CR helped organize an effort by more than 100 groups and small companies to drum up support. CR alone has generated more than 25,000 consumer messages; you can still add your voice at **CR.org/competition**.

ILLUSTRATIONS: JOHN RITTER

Source: "Platform Perceptions: Consumer Attitudes on Competition and Fairness in Online Platforms," CR survey, September 2020.

CR SAFETY UPDATE

In early 2021, CR lab tests found a problem with a smoke and carbon monoxide (CO) detector model made by Universal Security Instruments: The alarm could be set off too late or not at all when exposed to CO. We shared the results with the company and the Consumer Product Safety Commission at the time, and designated the model a Don't Buy: Performance Problem. In late March 2022, the company recalled this and another detector model, and offered to replace them free of charge. Learn more about the recalled models at **CR.org/universalalarm**.

Relief for Student Debt

WHAT'S AT STAKE

Two programs designed to make higher education more affordable have largely failed their intended beneficiaries. The Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program, which promises to erase any remaining student debt for borrowers who work in qualifying public-service and not-for-profit jobs after 10 years of payments, turned down 99 percent of those who applied. And as of September 2019, only 32 of some 4.4 million student borrowers who'd been repaying loans for 20-plus years had received forgiveness that had been promised by Income-Driven Repayment (IDR) plans.

Both programs—which long predate the current debate over blanket student loan cancellation—have been plagued by overly complicated rules and mismanagement on the part of the Department of Education and loan servicers.

HOW CR HAS YOUR BACK

CR has been pushing to make sure these borrowers get the relief they'd been promised—and had earned—for years. In addition to working with regulators directly, we generated over 25,000 public comments in September 2021 urging the Department of Education to fix the PSLF program. That same month, our advocates held a well-attended webinar drawing attention to the problem.

In October 2021 the department expanded eligibility for the PSLF, and in April it made similar fixes to the IDR loan cancellation program. Tens of thousands of student loans will be forgiven, and millions more are closer to it, as a result.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Learn more about the new policies, and how to take advantage of the programs, at **CR.org/studentloans**.

SAVE BIG ON Rx DRUGS!
ONLINE PHARMACIES CAN OFFER MEDS FOR LESS THAN YOU'D PAY ELSEWHERE—EVEN WITHOUT USING INSURANCE. HERE'S WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW TO GET THE BEST DEALS.
CARS THAT LAST FOR 200,000+ MILES
THE DANGEROUS CHEMICALS IN FAST FOOD WRAPPERS
QUICK FIXES FOR CLUTTER
CR Consumer Reports
WHERE TO GET
Rx DRUGS FOR LESS
Online pharmacies offer amazing deals on common meds, like the generic version of Lipitor (one month's supply)
$13.99* COSTCO
$3.90 MARK CUBAN COST PLUS DRUG CO.
$3.00 MONEYRX
$9.90 HEALTHWAREHOUSE.COM
$0.54* SCRIPTCO
$14.60* AMAZON

Our May 2022 article **"Save Big on Rx Drugs!"** shared important info on how to get the best possible prices when buying your prescription meds online. Our readers shared their own money-saving strategies. To add your ideas, head to **CR.org/rxdrugcosts**.

MANY THANKS FOR your story "Save Big on Rx Drugs!" I have been on Medicare for three years, and none of the drug plans I've had have a decent price for Estradiol—helpful for women in menopause. Under my current drug plan, I paid $100 for eight doses. After I investigated all of the mail-order plans included in the story, I found the drug at CostPlusDrugs.com: 30 doses for a grand total of $34.10, which included $5 shipping. Wow. You have paid for my subscription to Consumer Reports for a few years with the savings! Thanks for your great service.
–Patricia Van Zandt, Williamsburg, VA

THANK YOU FOR your reporting. As a Medicare Part D subscriber, on my plan this year I pay dearly for any script that isn't a tier 1 drug. My healthcare provider usually pushes back regarding my requests for a paper script so I can comparison shop before a script is transmitted to my "selected" pharmacy provider. Transferring a script sent electronically is not always easy or optimal.
–Linda Webb, Willoughby, OH

EDITOR'S NOTE *All of the online pharmacies we checked when reporting our May feature allowed consumers to comparison shop without requiring proof of a prescription. If you find a site you'd like to use, you can ask your doctor or pharmacist to transfer the prescription to the online seller. Some websites may even put in the request on your behalf.*

THANKS FOR SOME names of online pharmacies. I switched a tier 3 prescription from my Costco warehouse to Costco's mail-order service, which saved me considerably because it was not run through my insurance. Then I discovered that it was cheaper still at the Costco warehouse if not run through insurance. So many rules, games, and obtuse strategies in our chaotic healthcare system!
–Barry Northrop, via CR.org

YOUR RECENT ARTICLE didn't mention the prescription discount programs in Oregon and Washington state administered by ArrayRx. Every resident of the state is eligible, but they have to join. There is no membership fee. The discounts are substantial and honored by many pharmacies in both states. The discounts are sometimes enough that the drug will cost less than some insurance copays.
–Alex Censor, Ashland, OR

WHEN I LOOKED at [an online pharmacy] several years ago, the fine print stated that it would harvest your web browser history and resell it. Pharmacy staff are just being helpful when they tell you to go online to get a coupon, but no one mentions that by doing so, you give up your privacy.
–Wendy Eidukas, St. Paul, MN

EDITOR'S NOTE *It's possible that some online pharmacies may collect information about you. One easy way to protect your privacy when looking for Rx drug discounts may be to ask your pharmacist to look up and print out coupons for you.*

ARE MAILED MEDICATIONS safe? Your article on lower prices was excellent. My insurance offers a very inexpensive plan if it can mail the medication. I have researched degradation due to heat and to a lesser degree cold. With slower mail service and a metal mailbox, I am concerned. I am hypertensive and do not want my medications to be degraded and not work. Any thoughts or research in this area?
–George Hager, Collegeville, PA

WRITE

Go to CR.org/lettertoeditor to share your comments for publication.

EDITOR'S NOTE *Pharmacies that regularly ship prescriptions through the mail say they take precautions to ensure the medication isn't exposed to temperature and humidity extremes that would compromise efficacy. For example, Amazon told CR it designs its packaging and shipping materials to withstand extremes. Costco told us that at least twice a year and during periods of extreme weather, it sends test prescriptions through the mail that include devices that record temperature and humidity levels within the packaging. When problems emerge, the company modifies its shipping practices. More than 1 billion prescription drugs are sent through the mail every year, which not only reduces medication costs but eliminates the risk of a pharmacy not delivering needed drugs in a timely way. That said, it's best to check with your doctor to make sure that any medications you take can be safely shipped, because some are more sensitive than others.*

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200,000-MILE VEHICLES

I READ WITH much interest your article "How to Make Your Car Last 200,000+ Miles." My 1994 Camry made it to 262K. One thing to keep in mind: Even if you drive 20K miles/year, it will still take you 10 years to reach 200K miles. During that time, cars will have changed substantially (especially regarding safety features). The result is that a 200K car could be quite antiquated.
–Mark Rotter, San Ramon, CA

EDITOR'S NOTE *A decade is a solid run for a car, but you certainly need to consider the costs, reliability, and safety of the vehicle as it ages. Buying a new car to access the latest in safety features is a smart move if you can afford it. You should also keep an eye out for rust and other mechanical deterioration on older cars (especially if you park your car outside), which can become a safety issue.*

I ENJOYED READING "What to Expect on the Way to 200,000 Miles." But I almost fell out of my chair when I read the price of brake pads at $607/pair. Brake pads can be purchased from a local auto parts store for $30 to $50. Many readers can install them by themselves after watching a YouTube video. The significant savings can be used to buy helpful tools and still keep money in your pocket. I'm not an auto mechanic, but online videos have helped me determine whether or not a repair is a DIY project or a professional mechanic project.
–Matthew Thompson, Beaver Falls, PA

EDITOR'S NOTE *Our cost estimate for brake pad replacement included brake rotors, which increases the price greatly. We don't advise that those who are not experienced in auto mechanics do most types of repair (especially brake maintenance or repair). For brake pads, we recommend taking your car to an independent repair shop, which may cost less than going to a dealer. There are some minor tasks you can do yourself to save money, such as replacing air filters, windshield wiper blades, and some types of headlight bulbs. For DIY car repair pointers, go to* ***CR.org/diyauto.***

SO LONG, PAPER CLUTTER!

I read with interest your May article "Goodbye, Mess: Quick Ways to Organize Your Stuff." The section "Paperwork Piles" did not mention minimizing accumulated paperwork in the first place. For several years I have allowed almost zero paperwork to reside long-term in my home. I can receive billing statements, important receipts, even insurance policies by email now. What I do receive on paper can be scanned and electronically stored. I have downsized from about 12 file cabinet drawers of paper to two drawers.
—Peter Rockwell, Camano Island, WA

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Digitizing papers is a great way to declutter—but many cloud options charge subscription fees if you need over 5GB of space. To help decide which online storage services might be right for you, go to* ***CR.org/cloudstorage****.*

YOU SAY NOT to splurge on synthetic oil unless the owner's manual calls for it. But doesn't synthetic oil last longer? So wouldn't you save money in the long run by using it and needing fewer changes?
–Daniel Burstein, Jacksonville, FL

EDITOR'S NOTE *Manufacturers state that you should change your oil when you reach a specific mileage, regardless of oil type. We don't recommend going longer between oil changes than your manual states, because it may void your warranty coverage.*

ORDERING FLOWERS

IN YOUR MAY 2022 article "What That $55 Bouquet Really Looks Like," you didn't suggest ordering directly from local florists. Online flower companies often contract with local florists to make bouquets, so by ordering directly you can cut out the middleman and support a small business in your community. Many small florists have online ordering just like the big ones, or you can call the florist about a custom bouquet.
–Joanna Laine, Brooklyn, NY

ILLUSTRATION BY JASON SCHNEIDER

What We're Testing in Our Labs ...

In our 63 labs, we continually review and rate products. Here, timely picks for this month.

Mesh Routers

WE TESTED: 34 models
WE TEST FOR: The internet speed ("throughput") from 8 to 55 feet away from the router base, how easy the model is to set up, how well it protects your privacy, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 72
Range: 31-83

EXCELLENT SPEED
Netgear Orbi AC1200 (3-Pack)
$200

82 OVERALL SCORE

EASY TO SET UP
Google Nest Wifi (3-Pack)
$250

81 OVERALL SCORE

BUDGET-FRIENDLY PICK
T-P Link Deco W3600 AX1800 (2-Pack)
$130

73 OVERALL SCORE

Electric Pressure Washers

WE TESTED: 24 models
WE TEST FOR: Efficiency and ease in cleaning a range of surfaces, the amount of pressure offered, and noise level when in use.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 58
Range: 45-68

BEST OVERALL CLEANER
Greenworks GPW2301
$250

68 OVERALL SCORE

NICE PRICE & EASY TO USE
Worx WG604
$170

65 OVERALL SCORE

QUIET & GOOD STAIN REMOVAL
Greenworks GPW2700
$350

65 OVERALL SCORE

Ask Our Experts

Is there anything I *shouldn't* clean with my new pressure washer?

PRESSURE WASHERS are great for cleaning concrete patios and driveways, but there are some surfaces to avoid. Decks made from hardwoods (like ipe) and even many pressure-treated woods (like Southern yellow pine) are usually fine to pressure-wash, but composite decks might not be, and doing so could void your warranty. Check with the brand first, and start with a low-pressure nozzle on an inconspicuous spot to ensure that the spray doesn't leave marks. Take care with aluminum siding and wood shingles–the spray can dent aluminum and loosen shingles. (Low pressure on vinyl, fiber cement, and wood clapboard siding should be fine.) Finally, never pressure-wash roofing or a car–it could result in damage.

ILLUSTRATION: SERGE BLOCH

For the latest ratings of these and other product categories, readers with a Digital or All Access membership can go to **CR.org**.

Dish Detergents

WE TESTED: 23 products
WE TEST FOR: How well a dish detergent removes caked-on food from dinner plates, how well it resists leaving water spots on clear drinking glasses, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 75
Range: 47-92

EXCELLENT SINGLE-USE PACS (25 COUNT)
Cascade ActionPacs with Dawn
22¢ per load

89 OVERALL SCORE

BULK BUY OF SINGLE-USE PACS (115 COUNT)
Kirkland Signature (Costco) Platinum Performance UltraShine
9¢ per load

86 OVERALL SCORE

BARGAIN GEL BOTTLE (75 OZ.)
Great Value Dishwasher Gel (Walmart)
5¢ per load

74 OVERALL SCORE

Interior Paints

WE TESTED: 23 products
WE TEST FOR: How well a paint covers a black surface in a single coat, and how well a paint resists oil- and water-based stains.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 64
Range: 44-88

TOP PICK AT HOME DEPOT
Behr Marquee
$53 per gallon

88 OVERALL SCORE

BEST CHOICE AT LOWE'S
HGTV Home by Sherwin-Williams Infinity
$62 per gallon

85 OVERALL SCORE

GOOD VALUE & NO VOCs* (AT HOME DEPOT)
Behr Premium Plus
$35 per gallon

79 OVERALL SCORE

Rice Cookers

WE TESTED: 6 models
WE TEST FOR: How perfectly a model cooks rice; how easy it is to use the model's controls, including its programmed settings; and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 67
Range: 59-76

EASY TO CLEAN
Instant Zest 8-Cup (Cooked) $30

70 OVERALL SCORE

GENEROUS 5-YEAR WARRANTY
Hamilton Beach Cooker and Steamer 37519 (8-Cup, Cooked) $35

70 OVERALL SCORE

SPACE-SAVER THAT MAKES EXCELLENT RICE
Zojirushi NHS-06 3-Cup (Uncooked) $45

61 OVERALL SCORE

Air Purifiers

WE TESTED: 90 models
WE TEST FOR: How well the air purifier removes dust and smoke, the level of noise a purifier makes, how easy it is to use, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 49
Range: 12-91

TOP PERFORMER BUT PRICEY
Alen BreatheSmart 75i Pure
$750

91 OVERALL SCORE

GREAT DUST REMOVAL FOR LESS
Blueair Blue Pure 211+
$300

85 OVERALL SCORE

QUIETER PICK
Honeywell InSight HPA5300B
$250

74 OVERALL SCORE

Note: *We rate different products according to different testing protocols; as a result, Overall Scores of one product category are not comparable with another.*
**CR doesn't test manufacturer claims about volatile organic compounds (VOCs).*

COMING NEXT MONTH Chest Freezers & More

How can I fix a small area of peeling paint in my bathroom?

IF YOU HAVE leftover paint in the original color, check to see if it's still usable, says Rich Handel, who oversees paint ratings at CR. You'll know the paint is too old to use if you find a thick, rubberlike layer sitting on top of the paint, or the paint doesn't mix well when stirred. (Paint that's still usable should stay blended for 10 to 15 minutes after mixing.) To test it, try painting a small area on a piece of cardboard: The paint should go onto the surface smoothly, and the color should be uniform. If you determine that the paint isn't usable, take the can to a paint or home improvement store and ask whether it can match the color for you.

Before applying fresh paint to the wall, use a metal putty knife to scrape away the cracked or peeling paint, smoothing any bumps and edges around nail holes. Taper sharp edges where old paint remains by sanding lightly with very fine sandpaper. Then mix ¼ cup of a low-suds household detergent (such as Spic and Span powder cleanser) into 1 gallon of warm water. Dip a dual-sided scrub sponge into the bucket and lightly rough up the surface for better paint adhesion. Then wipe down the wall with clean water and a cloth to remove any residual detergent. Once the area is dry, use a spackling compound to fill in any depressions and sand them, so the surface is smooth.

To apply the paint, use a roller or brush (our experts suggest using synthetic brushes for water-based paints and natural brushes for oil-based ones), going a little beyond the spot you're touching up to blend any edges. If the touched-up spot is noticeable when it's dry, you may need to repaint a larger area or the entire wall.

LEARN

We have more than 140 in-house experts who research, test, and compare. Submit your questions at CR.org/askourexperts ... and watch for the answers.

Will buying a car with lighter-colored seats keep my car's interior cooler?

IT WILL, but not by much. CR test engineers decided to investigate this long-held theory using two cars—one with a light-colored exterior and interior and the other with a dark exterior and interior. The testers parked the cars in the sun. According to Mike Monticello, CR's road-test manager, "The initial temperature inside both cars was 78° F. Within an hour, the temperature for both was over 100° F. The dark-colored car registered 109° F, while the light-colored one was at 104° F." So although the vehicle with the light-colored interior was slightly less hot, it was still far from cool inside.

A better way to stay comfortable while driving on hot days is to consider buying a vehicle with cooled or ventilated seats, which blow cool air on you through perforated upholstery. It's a feature that's becoming more widely available: For example, you can find it offered in some midpriced Ford and Kia models. By the way, there is a good reason to opt for a dark interior: It will hide dirt and stains more easily than a light interior.

I'm tired of finding wilted lettuce in my fridge. How can I make it last longer?

THERE ARE a few things you can do. First, buy hardier types of lettuce. Delicate leaf lettuces, such as arugula and baby lettuce mixes, stay fresh for only a few days in the fridge, while romaine and iceberg last about a week. Also, buy whole lettuce, which you wash at home, rather than prewashed, cut, and packaged lettuce, which tends to spoil more quickly. If you do opt for packaged lettuce, check for moisture inside the container—that's a sign that the lettuce might not last as long.

You can also do a few things to keep lettuce fresher in your fridge. First, remove any slimy or damaged leaves. Place the remaining lettuce in an airtight container, along with a clean, damp cloth or paper towel to help absorb excess moisture. Then store it in your fridge's crisper drawer. In many fridges, the humidity of each crisper drawer can be adjusted separately. Set the drawer to high for veggies prone to spoiling quickly, such as leafy greens and broccoli. Keep produce that ripens over time, including apples, avocados, and pears, in a different drawer, away from lettuce. (The ethylene gas they emit can hasten spoilage in other nearby produce.)

ILLUSTRATIONS BY SERGE BLOCH

CR Insights

IN THE KNOW

For a Better Walk, Try This

YOU'VE PROBABLY HEARD IT a thousand times. A daily walk can boost your cardiovascular health, while helping you to relax and enjoy the great outdoors. But as you're getting that fresh air, little annoyances—mosquitoes buzzing around you or headphones that conk out unexpectedly—can suck the fun out of your time out there. To make your walks more enjoyable this summer, consider this list of top-rated gear and editor's picks.

GET IN THE GROOVE

Sennheiser CX 350BT $80

73 OVERALL SCORE

These earphones offer great sound at a nice price, and because they're connected to each other on a wire, they can rest on the back of your neck when you're done listening to that podcast. They wirelessly connect to your phone or smartwatch (or other device) via Bluetooth.

TRACK YOUR PROGRESS

Fitbit Inspire 2 $100

84 OVERALL SCORE

This band pairs easily with an iPhone or Android phone. It also rates Very Good at accurately counting steps and measuring heart rate, so you can see how your walks are stacking up each time. What's more: You can wear the band for 10 days without charging it.

BRING THE ESSENTIALS

Patagonia Ultralight Black Hole Mini Hip Pack $29

Made of weather-resistant recycled nylon, this bag clips around your waist or hips (or can be worn as a cross body sling), leaving your hands free. Though compact (4.75x8x2 inches), it offers a 1-liter capacity—enough room to fit a phone, a wallet, keys, sunscreen, and more.

STAY HYDRATED

Zojirushi 16-oz. mug $28

5/5 TEMPERATURE RETENTION

Quench your thirst on a long walk with this slim, lightweight thermos. It keeps drinks cold for 7 hours (or hot for 13½ hours). Our testers noted that the cap is easy to open with one hand. Then simply lock the leakproof lid if you need to throw it in a bag.

KEEP BUGS AT BAY

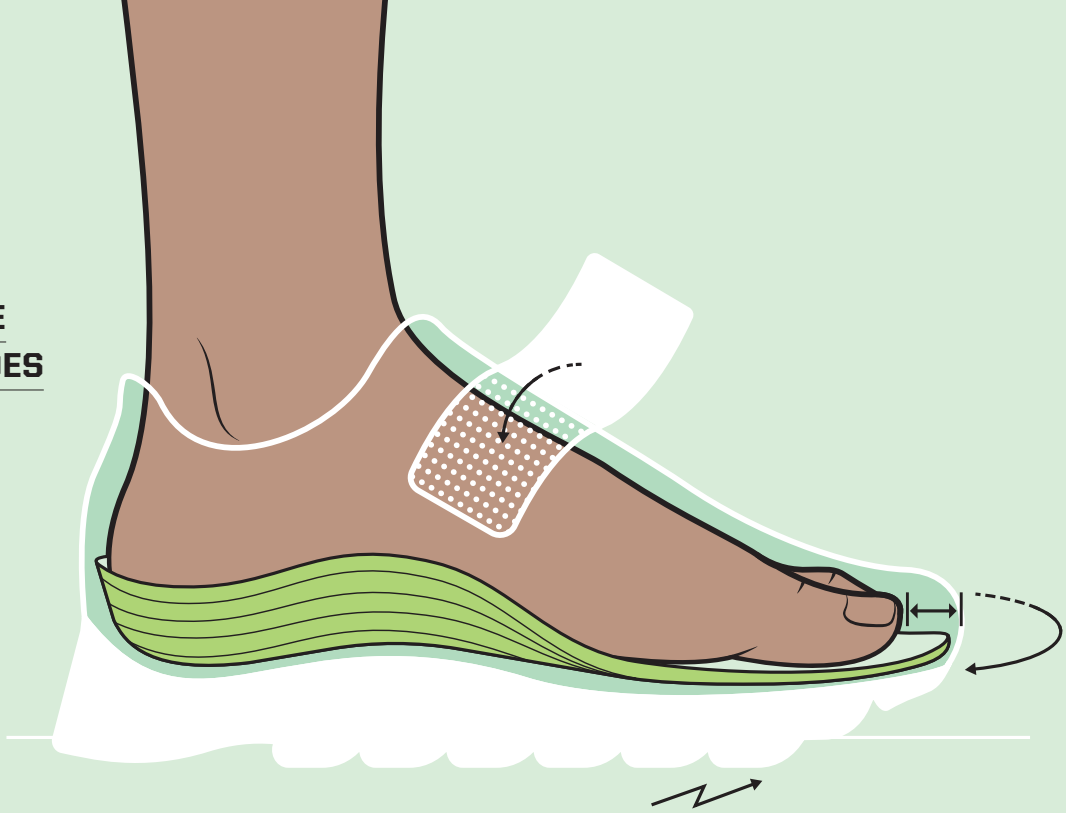
Ben's Tick & Insect Repellent Wipes $6

96 OVERALL SCORE

If you love to walk in wooded areas or around high grass, it's wise to wear insect repellent. These wipes (which come individually wrapped) are the best repellent we've rated. Use a sheet to quickly wipe exposed skin before you head out.

Comfortable, supportive athletic shoes are also important for any walking routine.
Turn the page for expert tips on how to find the best fit for you.

ILLUSTRATIONS: RODRIGO DAMATI. PHOTOS, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: SENNHEISER; JOHN WALSH/CONSUMER REPORTS; FITBIT; PATAGONIA



CR SAVVY SHOPPER

HOW TO FIND MORE COMFORTABLE SHOES

FOOT PAIN? Chances are your shoes don't fit you right, and the consequences aren't just the aches you feel now. Shoes that are too small can cause serious problems down the road, like bunions and hammertoes. And wearing a pair that's too big causes blisters, and also puts you at risk of taking a serious fall. What follows here: strategies for finding the best possible fit.

1. SHOP FOR SHOES IN THE AFTERNOON

Feet swell over the course of the day, so the pair that feels okay in the morning might actually be too snug on you at dinnertime.

2. GET YOUR FEET MEASURED AGAIN

"I'm a size 8 and a half." It's your automatic response to the inevitable question from a salesperson, but how accurate is that sizing? Footwear that fits properly should have between ⅜ and ½ inch of space between the tips of your big toes and the shoe's end when you're standing up. The front of the shoe should also accommodate the width of your foot when you're standing, without any pressure. Your heel should fit snugly; it should not slip up and down when you take a few steps around the store, and you shouldn't feel any pinching, pressure, or sliding. Never buy shoes that are too snug now, with the idea that you'll "break them in" later.

3. LOOK FOR TRACTION

Rubber soles with treads provide the best traction on most surfaces in wet and dry conditions. Also consider shoes with Velcro rather than laces, which can become a tripping hazard when untied. And though slip-ons like classic flip-flops might seem like a great choice for summer, they typically offer little traction and increase your risk of tripping. Choosing a supportive athletic shoe is a much smarter pick for stability.

4. SUPPORT TROUBLED FEET

If you have hammertoes, bunions, or calluses, get shoes with stretchable fabric and square-shaped toes, which put less pressure on problem areas. Choosing a "wide" size can also help. If you have osteoarthritis, opt for firm shoes (think athletic shoes with arch support rather than slip-on flats). If the fat pads on the bottoms of your feet have thinned, consider custom inserts for more arch support.

CR Time Traveler GREEN HOME

1948 We test corded electric lawn mowers and say they're lighter and quieter than gas mowers, but the power cords can snag on trees.

1954 At Bell labs, scientists develop solar "cells" that convert the sun's energy into electric power to run equipment, such as a telephone.

1959 We tell readers how to make any A/C unit more efficient: by vacuuming condenser coils and cleaning or replacing filters regularly.

1975 President Gerald R. Ford signs the Energy Policy and Conservation Act (EPCA), which includes efficiency standards for appliances.

1980 We find that bottom-freezer fridges aren't energy-efficient. Buying a top-freezer saves more than $2,000 in electric bills over the life of the fridge.

POOR EXCELLENT | RECOMMENDED | CR BEST BUY | GREEN CHOICE

PHOTOS, BOTTOM LEFT TO RIGHT: CONSUMER REPORTS; AT&T ARCHIVES; CONSUMER REPORTS; PUBLIC DOMAIN; CONSUMER REPORTS; CHRIS PHILPOT; CONSUMER REPORTS

OUTSIDE THE LABS

Is Boxed Wine a Good Idea?

HAVE YOU NOTICED the ever-increasing number of boxed wine options appearing in your local wine shop? The cost can be very attractive—about 50 percent less per ounce of wine than you'd pay for a traditional glass bottle. Many boxes contain about 3 liters of wine (four times more than a standard 0.75L bottle). What's more, boxed wine stays drinkable up to six weeks after it has been opened. And—in spite of the plastic bag inside that holds the actual vino—boxed wine has a lighter environmental footprint than glass, partly because it weighs less and stacks easily, making it much more sustainable to transport.

Our staff evaluated 11 popular boxed red and white wines—and we found some delicious, budget-friendly options that are worth a try. Our top three picks are below.

For even more wine reviews, go to ***CR.org/boxedwine****.*

BEST WHITE WINE

Black Box Sauvignon Blanc 2020 (3L) $20

This Chilean sauvignon blanc is light-bodied with a crisp acidity and fruity notes—think grapefruit, melon, and green apples. Quaff this with a triple-cream Brie or a shrimp cocktail, our tasters suggest.

GREAT VALUE RED

Domaine Bousquet Natural Origins Organic Malbec (3L) $16

Malbecs tend to be pretty robust, making them a popular pick to pair with rich meaty dishes like a beef stew ... or in summer, a big juicy burger. The organic wine here can be found at Trader Joe's, and has hints of cranberry and vanilla.

BEST RED WINE

Wineberry Chateau du Chatelard Beaujolais 2018 (3L) (shown above) $40

Our evaluators liked that this hefty wooden box looks elegant enough to bring to a dinner party. More important, it contains a bright Beaujolais from France with notes of blackberry and currant. We'd suggest pairing this with a rich cheese, like a Camembert, or with salumi, an Italian cured meat.

1992 The EPA launches the Energy Star Label, which points consumers to energy-efficient products. Computers are first to get the label.

1998 We advise readers that lowering your thermostat by 2 degrees will reduce carbon dioxide emissions from a furnace by about 6 percent.

2013 For a "green" kitchen countertop, we recommend recycled glass, which is scratch- and heat-resistant, as well as sustainably sourced.

2016 The number of home solar panel installations in the U.S. soars. We help readers determine whether solar is a smart financial move for them.

2022 CR's Green Choice designation—launched last year to ID the most eco-friendly appliances—includes water-efficient washing machines like the LG below.

LG WT7800CW
$1,050
83 OVERALL SCORE

For more CR Green Choice products, turn to "Save More, Waste Less," on page 22.

GREEN THUMB GUIDE

A Lush Lawn Made Easier

EVERY YEAR, we plant 1,800 pounds of grass seed at CR's Florida test facility–and then mow 500,000 square feet–to put the latest lawn tools to the test. Our experts uncovered some of the hardest-working and easiest-to-use models for you so that tending your lawn will be much more pleasant.

BATTERY PUSH MOWER FOR SMALL LAWNS

Ryobi RY401220 $700

83 OVERALL SCORE

For lawns up to a quarter-acre in size, try a push mower. This Ryobi cuts grass evenly and comes with two batteries that, combined, offer 1½ hours of run time–longer than other push mowers we've tested.

AGILE GAS MOWER FOR LARGE LAWNS

Honda HRX217HZA $980

87 OVERALL SCORE

If you have a large yard (near a half-acre), our experts say a gas, self-propelled mower may work better for you. This Honda is easy to handle–but keep in mind that gas prices have been rising, and gas mowers require more maintenance than battery models.

LIGHTWEIGHT TRIMMER

Stihl FSA 57 $200

86 OVERALL SCORE

Neaten the edges of walkways or whack weeds in a flash with this 7.5-pound Stihl trimmer. Plus, the battery-powered motor is easy to start and the shaft's length adjusts to your height for added comfort.

HANDY BATTERY BLOWER

Makita GBU01M1 $380

86 OVERALL SCORE

Leaf blowers aren't just for autumn cleanups–they're great for blowing away twigs, grass clippings, and fallen petals. This Makita is lightweight, and there's no cord to trip you up and no gas engine to maintain.

3 MUST-HAVE GARDENING TOOLS

Whether you're tending a large plot of land or just a tiny terrace, these CR staff and pro favorites will help you enjoy your time spent in greenery.

HAND PRUNER

Corona FlexDial ComfortGel Bypass Pruners $39

This cushy pair has gel grip handles that adjust to your hand size, which may reduce muscle fatigue.

GARDENING GLOVES

Pine Tree Tools Bamboo Gardening Gloves $10

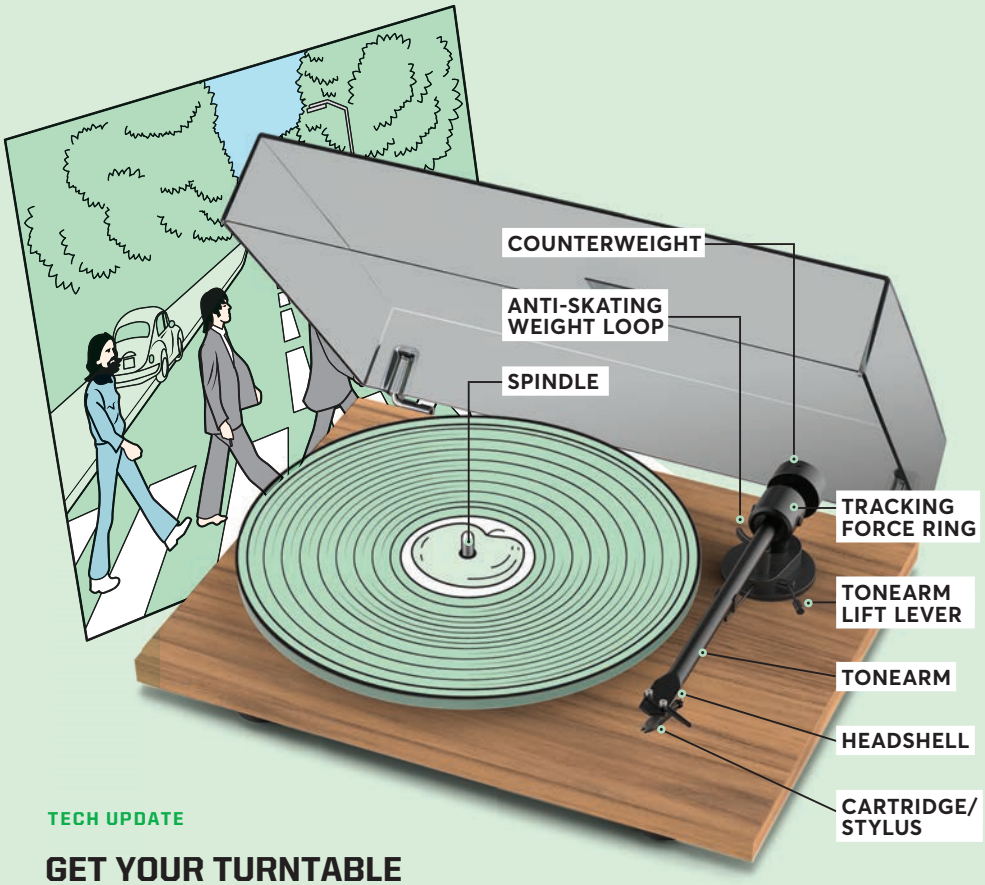
Protect your hands from dirt and thorns–but still be able to use the touch screen on your smartphone.

STANDING WEEDER

Fiskars 4-Claw Weeder $49

This tool keeps you from having to hunch over while you weed, and it's especially good at extracting deep-rooted dandelions.

POOR EXCELLENT | RECOMMENDED CR BEST BUY



A NICE SET FOR ENTHUSIASTS

Pro-Ject Audio Systems T1 Phono BT (shown at left) $550

This sleek turntable has a traditional setup, allowing you to adjust more settings than the Sony below (such as the vertical tracking force or VTF) to get the sound just right. It easily pairs to any wireless Bluetooth speaker system, and also has a USB port, should you wish to connect it directly to your computer.

FULLY AUTOMATIC PLUG-AND-PLAY

Sony PS-LX310BT $250

A budget-friendly pick, this turntable is about as easy as it gets: There's no fiddling to align a cartridge, set the VTF, or adjust the azimuth. It can connect to headphones or speakers via a built-in preamp, USB, or Bluetooth connection, and it plays with the press of a "Start" button.

PHOTOS, FACING PAGE FROM TOP: RYOBI; HONDA; MAKITA. THIS PAGE, FROM TOP: PRO-JECT; SONY

TECH UPDATE

GET YOUR TURNTABLE PLAYING AGAIN

IN THE LAST FEW YEARS, vinyl music has experienced a true revival: Record revenues grew 61 percent to reach $1 billion in 2021, according to the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA). Thinking of dusting off your favorite albums and giving them a spin? Your old turntable may need a little TLC before you do. Here's how to get it to sound great again.

1. MAKE SURE IT'S CLEAN AND LEVEL

Carefully wipe away any dust using a soft lint-free cloth. If the stylus (aka the needle) is dirty, you can buy a specialized stylus brush (about $9 to $19) to clean it. Then use bubble levels or a dedicated turntable level (about $25 to $30) to check that the surface you set it up on is level—a tilted turntable can result in poor sound quality and cause premature wear on your records. Some turntables have adjustable feet to help.

2. ASSESS THE STYLUS

The stylus, held by the cartridge, usually needs to be replaced every few years. Signs you may need a new stylus include if its point has dulled or you notice it skips while playing. You can buy a stylus (about $35 and up) or a whole new cartridge (about $130 and up), which comes with a stylus and can usually be installed using a flathead screwdriver. To install a cartridge, tighten the fasteners just enough so that the cartridge is snug and doesn't move. Don't overtighten it. Then connect the color-coded wire leads from the tonearm to the corresponding pins on the cartridge. (This is a job best done using tweezers.)

3. CHECK THE TRACKING FORCE

The vertical tracking force (VTF) dictates how hard the stylus presses down in the record groove. Too much—or too little—force can degrade performance and make for poor sound quality. Refer to the turntable or cartridge manual for specific adjustment instructions for your set. You can also measure the VTF using a tracking force gauge (about $20 to $30).

4. ALIGN THE CARTRIDGE

Properly aligning the cartridge can help ensure you get the best sound and reduce wear on your records. It's wise to use a piece of paper with an "alignment protractor" printed on it to help position the cartridge properly. You may be able to download a printout from the manufacturer's website; if not, download one free of charge at vinylengine.com.

5. SET THE ANTI-SKATING FORCE

If you hear an improper balance between the left and right speakers when playing music, the stylus may be pressing unevenly into the record grooves—a well-adjusted anti-skating force helps prevent that. Some turntables have a dial or a slider to adjust the anti-skating force; set it to the manufacturer's recommendations.

6. SET THE AZIMUTH

Azimuth is a fancy name for how far left or right the cartridge body tilts—when set properly, the stylus is held perfectly perpendicular to the record. Most players have a set screw at the back of the tonearm to adjust this. It can be tricky to find on some turntables, so refer to your manual.

7. REPAIR OR REPLACE IT

If your turntable still isn't sounding right (or just isn't working), a local vinyl store may be able to diagnose it. If it's too far gone, consider a new model with modern conveniences like wireless Bluetooth connectivity, like the models shown above.

For more information on other adjustments you can make, go to ***CR.org/turntable.***

Note: CR does not currently test or rate turntable products.

FOOD IQ™

Make World-Class Waffles

PULL OUT your waffle maker: We have surprising advice for making your waffles crispy on the outside and softly delicious inside ... every time.

› Whip your whites.
For fluffier waffles, separate your egg yolks from the whites. Then add the yolks to the batter's liquid ingredients. Whisk the whites in a separate bowl until stiff peaks form, then fold them gently into the batter using a rubber spatula.

› Use vegetable oil—not butter—in your batter for crispier waffles.
Oil doesn't contain water (butter does), which keeps a good crust from forming.

› Add cornstarch.
If you're making waffles with baking powder and baking soda, add cornstarch to help keep waffles crispy on the outside and tender inside. Use ¼ cup for a recipe that makes about 14 waffles.

› Don't over-grease your griddle.
Most waffle maker manuals recommend oiling the griddle with a greased paper towel before making the first waffle. (Avoid using an aerosol nonstick cooking spray, which can contain chemicals that ruin the nonstick coating.)

› Strike while the iron's hot.
It's important to preheat the waffle maker for 5 to 10 minutes before pouring in your first batch of batter. If the appliance isn't hot enough, waffles may come out too pale and soft. Pause for 2 to 3 minutes between batches to let the iron heat up again.

› Finish your waffles in the oven.
To keep cooked waffles warm while serving a crowd, transfer them from the iron to an oven set to 200° F. Place the waffles directly on the oven rack. The low heat will actually make them crispier and help them to stay that way longer.

WAFFLE MAKERS OUR TESTERS LIKE

EVEN BROWNING & EASY TO USE

Calphalon CKCLWF1 $120

82 OVERALL SCORE

HOT DEAL FOR ROUND WAFFLES

Chefman Anti-Overflow Belgian Waffle Maker $40

76 OVERALL SCORE

GOOD FOR A CROWD

Cuisinart WAF-150 $60

61 OVERALL SCORE

For CR's healthy, 130-calorie whole-wheat waffle recipe, go to ***CR.org/healthywaffles****.*

PHOTO, TOP: CALPHALON

Ask Our Experts

IS THERE A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MAPLE SYRUP AND 'TABLE' SYRUP?

Yes. Pure maple syrup is made from maple tree sap that's been boiled down to concentrate the sugars, resulting in its characteristic rich color and flavor. (The darker the syrup, the more intense the flavor.) But table syrup, such as a bottle of Mrs. Butterworth's or Pearl Milling Company syrup, is a highly processed product—and most don't contain any maple syrup at all. The primary ingredient in table syrup is corn syrup and/or high-fructose corn syrup. You'll also find added coloring, flavoring, and preservatives in table syrup.

Though maple and table syrup contain similar amounts of calories and sugars per serving, maple syrup should have only one ingredient on its nutrition label: maple syrup. Pure maple syrup also offers some nutrients that table syrup doesn't, such as the mineral manganese and the B vitamin riboflavin, plus a small amount of calcium, potassium, zinc, and antioxidants.

POOR EXCELLENT | RECOMMENDED CR BEST BUY

RECALLS

TO STAY INFORMED ABOUT RECALLS FOR YOUR VEHICLES, READERS WITH MEMBERSHIP CAN USE OUR FREE CAR RECALL TRACKER AT **CR.ORG/MORE**.

FORD AND LINCOLN VEHICLES

Ford is recalling nearly 653,000 trucks and SUVs, including the 2020-2021 Ford F-150 pickup truck, 2020-2021 Ford Expedition and Lincoln Navigator SUVs, and 2020-2022 Ford Super Duty F-250, F-350, F-450, and F-550 trucks, because their windshield wipers may suddenly stop working or even detach. The problem is due to a poorly made part in the wiper assembly that can fail prematurely. If wipers fail while the vehicle is in motion, drivers may not be able to see the road ahead. **What to do:** Ford says it will contact owners by mail, but you can also call 866-436-7332. Ford dealerships will replace the faulty wiper arms, free of charge. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's campaign number is 22V-250. Ford's number for this recall is 22S26.

DOLLAR TREE GLUE GUNS

Dollar Tree is recalling about 1,025,000 Crafter's Square Glue Guns due to seven reports of electrical malfunctions, including four reports of fire and one report of skin irritation. This recalled product is black with an orange trigger and tip, with a silver UL Listed label located above the handle and "XY-15302" printed on the label. It was sold at Dollar Tree stores nationwide from August 2020 through February 2022 and Family Dollar stores nationwide from January 2022 through February 2022, and online at dollartree.com from August 2021 through February 2022, for about $1. **What to do:** Immediately unplug and stop using the glue gun. Return it to any Dollar Tree or Family Dollar store for a full refund.

INSIGNIA AIR FRYERS

Best Buy is recalling about 635,000 Insignia Digital Air Fryers, Insignia Analog Air Fryers, and Insignia Digital Air Fryer Ovens, model numbers NS-AF32DBK9, NS-AF32MBK9, NS-AF50MBK9, NS-AF53DSS0, NS-AF53MSS0, NS-AF55DBK9, NS-AFO6DBK1, and NS-AFO6DSS1, sold in U.S. stores. The air fryer or air fryer ovens can catch fire, burn, or melt—causing a risk of injury or damage to property. The air fryers and air fryer ovens were sold at Best Buy stores nationwide and online at bestbuy.com, ebay.com, and google.com from November 2018 through February 2022 for between $30 and $150. **What to do:** Stop using the product and call Best Buy at 800-566-7498 to arrange a return via a prepaid shipping box. The company is offering a credit of $50 or the amount on the purchase receipt if higher.

OLIGHT MINI FLASHLIGHTS

Olight is recalling about 215,100 M2R Pro and Warrior Mini Flashlights due to 127 reports of the product turning on inadvertently and overheating, which can result in burn injuries. The products were sold through Amazon, olightstore.com, and small independent stores nationwide from November 2019 through November 2021 for between $48 and $120. **What to do:** Call Olight at 888-889-6870 or go to olightstore.com and click on "Recall Information" for a store credit, a free replacement flashlight, or a full refund.

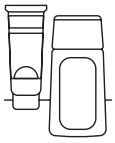
RAE WELLNESS SUPPLEMENTS

Rae Wellness is recalling about 191,200 bottles of Rae Wellness Prenatal and Rae Wellness Immunity Capsules. The products are dietary supplements containing iron, which by law must be in child-resistant packaging as required by the Poison Prevention Packaging Act (PPPA). The packaging of these products is not child-resistant, posing a risk of poisoning if the contents are swallowed by young children. The bottles were sold at Target stores nationwide and online at Amazon, fabfitfun.com, standarddose.com, target.com, and thrivemarket.com from September 2019 through February 2022 for the Rae Prenatal Capsules and from October 2020 through February 2022 for the Rae Immunity Capsules, for about $15. **What to do:** Keep the capsules out of reach of children and contact Rae Wellness for information on how to dispose of the product and receive a full refund. You can also contact the place of purchase for a full refund.

JULY IS THE BEST TIME TO BUY ...

DEHUMIDIFIERS

SUNSCREEN



MICROWAVES

For more info, go to CR.org/buy.

PRODUCT UPDATE

THE LATEST RATINGS FROM OUR LABS

The Right Smart Speaker for You

The standout models from our tests are versatile household helpers—and can offer impressive sound, too.

by Allen St. John

1
BEST BUDGET PICK
AMAZON ECHO DOT (4TH GEN) $50
53 OVERALL SCORE

2
GREAT SMART DISPLAY DESIGN
AMAZON ECHO SHOW 8 (2ND GEN) $130
64 OVERALL SCORE

3
TOP-QUALITY SOUND
SONOS ONE (GEN 2) $220
64 OVERALL SCORE

4
MULTIFUNCTIONAL VALUE
GOOGLE NEST MINI (2ND GEN) $50
44 OVERALL SCORE

ONLY A FEW YEARS AGO, smart speakers seemed like little more than quaint novelties with a sci-fi twist–The Clapper meets HAL 9000 from "2001: A Space Odyssey."

Now more than 40 percent of households in the U.S. own one, and millions of us routinely issue orders to (and direct questions at) these voice-controlled, internet-connected devices, which answer to names like Alexa, Siri, and Hey, Google.

It's little wonder: Smart speakers are generally simple to set up and use. They can do anything from adjusting your smart thermostat to shuffling your Ladies of the 80s playlist or ringing your sister for a videochat. (It's as easy as saying "Hey, Google, turn up the temperature," or "Alexa, play 'Bette Davis Eyes.' ") And during sales events, you can buy one for under $30.

As smart speakers have gone mainstream, however, it has become trickier to choose the right model. The range of features and capabilities has grown significantly since the Amazon Echo first appeared in 2014 looking a lot like a Pringles can. Some models now have built-in screens. Others feature impressive sound quality. And the prices can hit a hefty $400. There are two basic things to keep in mind as you weigh the options.

First, your buying decision should largely depend on how you plan to use your smart speaker. Will you mainly ask it to play music? Should it have a screen to display recipes when you're working in the kitchen? Or do you need a model that lets you take full advantage of products like Apple CarPlay or your Amazon account? We're here to guide you through such questions and direct you to the models that best suit your needs. (The ratings chart on page 21 can help with that process.)

Second, you should understand that while spending more on a smart speaker can buy you a touch screen or better sound, it won't make the device any smarter. A $50 Amazon Echo Dot is every bit as intelligent as the $350 Bose Home Speaker 500, for example. That's because the "brains" of a smart speaker don't live in the device itself but in the cloud-based computers at Amazon, Apple, or Google, and the cheapest devices have the same access as the most expensive ones. That's all the more reason to consider your needs before choosing a model for your home.

A Sound Decision

FOR ALL OF the clever tricks smart speakers can perform, most consumers use them primarily to play music.

This once was a problem because early models weren't tops for sound quality, but that has changed. You can now find models with sound rated Very Good from audio industry stalwarts like Bose and Sonos, as well as Amazon (see the Echo Studio). They generally cost $200 and up. But even a $100 model, like the latest-generation Amazon Echo, represents a major sonic upgrade from tinny-sounding budget models.

But here's an expert tip: You can buy an entry-level smart speaker–Amazon's Dot or Google's Home Mini, for example–and pair it to a stellar-sounding wireless model, like our top-rated Edifier S1000MKII, $350, for a system that's smart and sounds even better than our top-rated smart speaker.

Smart speakers can also be integrated into a multiroom system that allows the kids to blast Olivia Rodrigo in the basement while the adults listen to NPR's "Radiolab" podcast in the kitchen. And an increasing number of portable models have rechargeable batteries that allow you to bring your tunes outside, although you'll need a WiFi connection or mobile hot spot to take full advantage of voice commands.

Screen Selections

IN THE PAST couple of years, Amazon and Google have started making speakers with touch screens. Think of them as stationary tablets that respond to voice commands. These models, often called smart displays, are super-helpful in the kitchen, allowing you to call up recipes, screen how-to videos, and make video calls to friends, all without having to stop chopping veggies or rinse off grimy hands.

The one problem? Kitchen real estate is often at a premium, and these devices can take up counter space that might otherwise be used by a coffee maker or stand mixer. Amazon's Echo Show 10, which has a screen that uses an electric motor to pivot on its base to follow you around the room, needs a patch about the size of a large pizza. And if you don't heed the company's placement requirements, the screen can swing around and knock over a coffee mug or bottle of cooking oil.

Other models may require less room, but you should consider how often you'll be using that screen functionality. Tablets, laptops, and even smartphones let you watch videos, albeit without voice control, and you can stow them away when you're done.

Amazon tries to address the space challenge with its new wall-mountable Echo Show 15 smart screen. It's designed to serve as a family hub, sort of the digital equivalent of Post-it notes and magnets on the fridge. But once you fasten it to the wall it's less versatile as a cooking aid, unless you're cool with returning to the screen each time you need to consult a recipe or how-to video.

It's hard to find a model with both

PHOTO: JOHN WALSH/CONSUMER REPORTS. SCREEN: AMAZON

a screen and good sound, so you may need to choose one or the other. As for privacy concerns, all smart speakers provide a switch to disable the built-in mic. Most models with smart displays allow you to turn off the built-in cameras, too.

Alexa, Google Assistant, or Siri?

DECIDING AMONG THE three most popular digital assistants isn't as big a decision as you might imagine. All three options work fairly well, particularly when it comes to the most popular tasks. Models from Bose, Sonos, and others allow you to choose between Alexa or Google Assistant, and Sonos has added a new privacy-friendly assistant ("Hey, Sonos") just for music commands. (Siri fans must buy a speaker made by Apple.)

But for people who are heavily invested in a suite of products and services from Amazon, Apple, or Google, there are minor differences worth noting.

Amazon has the broadest catalog of skills, over 100,000, the company claims, and more keep coming (see below). If you do a lot of shopping at Amazon, your Echo smart speakers can help. ("Alexa, order more Tide Pods.")

Do you want a speaker that's more adept at answering day-to-day questions? Google is the king of search, while Amazon's Alexa is powered by Microsoft's less-popular Bing search engine. And Apple lets you request driving directions from your HomePod Mini and send them to the Apple CarPlay app in your car.

7 Ways a Smart Speaker Can Make Your Life Easier

They're capable of assisting with thousands of tasks, but most people use only a few basic functions. Why settle for a $100 egg timer? Here are some really useful—and maybe surprising—things your smart speaker can do.

1 Find your phone. Is it under a sofa cushion or in the den? Ask your speaker to ping your smartphone ("Alexa, dial my phone") to find it fast.

2 Empower someone with mobility issues. A smart speaker can make it much easier to adjust the thermostat or answer the phone without getting up or rushing across a room. If you buy separate smart bulbs or smart plugs, you can use your voice to control the lights, too.

3 Translate in real time. Smart speakers can do translation—and a model with a screen can also show you the written exchange, making it a great language coach.

4 Snooze without a snooze button. A digital valet that wakes you up at an appointed time to a duet by Tony Bennett and Lady Gaga is valuable. But saying "Alexa, snooze" when you need 9 more minutes of shut-eye? Totally priceless.

5 Bark like a watchdog. Both Alexa and Google Assistant offer "burglar deterrent" modes that simulate household noises or even mimic a guard dog to ward off would-be intruders. If you add smart home devices or services, your speaker can send a notification to your phone if it hears the sound of glass breaking or a smoke alarm.

6 Play a game. You can try smart speaker spins on classics like Mad Libs and Hangman. Or try Song Quiz, which is—you guessed it—a digital song quiz.

7 Check in with your loved ones. If you give a smart speaker to an older relative or friend who lives alone, it can notify you if he or she doesn't engage with it by a certain time each day. Amazon's $20-per-month Alexa Together service also includes a fall-detection feature that will call for help if an external sensor (either wearable or wall-mounted) detects a fall. Google offers support features for older adults as well, but they're less robust.

Ratings › **Get Smart** Manage your music—and more—with these voice-controlled smart speakers. Sound quality is important for long-term satisfaction. Consider a model with a screen if you'll be using it in the kitchen.

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results			Features	
			Sound quality	Versatility	Ease of use	Supported digital assistant(s)	Info display
SMART SPEAKERS							
Amazon Echo Studio	68	$200	▲	▲▲	▲	Alexa	
Sonos Move	68	$400	▲	▲	▲	Alexa, Google	
Amazon Echo Show 10	67	$255	●	▲	▲▲	Alexa	●
Amazon 2 Echo (4th Gen) w/ Echo Sub	67	$330	●	▲▲	▲	Alexa	
Bose Home Speaker 500	65	$350	▲	▲	▲▲	Alexa	●
Amazon Echo (4th Gen)	65	$100	●	▲▲	▲	Alexa	
Bose Home Speaker 300	65	$200	▲	▲	▲	Alexa, Google	
Bose Portable Home	65	$380	▲	▲	▲	Alexa, Google	
Amazon Echo Show 8 (2nd Gen)	64	$130	●	▲	▲▲	Alexa	●
Sonos One (Gen 2)	64	$220	▲	●	▲	Alexa	
Google Nest Hub Max	63	$230	●	▲	▲	Google	●
Google Nest Audio	63	$100	●	▲	▲	Google	
Marshall Uxbridge Voice	62	$200	●	●	▲	Alexa	
Marshall Stanmore II Voice	60	$380	●	●	▲	Alexa	
JBL Link Music	60	$120	●	●	▲	Google	
Belkin Soundform Elite	59	$200	●	●	▲▲	Google	
Bang & Olufsen Beosound A1 (2nd Gen)	57	$225	●	▲	▲	Alexa	
Ultimate Ears Megablast	57	$300	●	●	●	Alexa	
Amazon Echo Show 15	56	$250	▼	▲	▲▲	Alexa	●

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results			Features	
			Sound quality	Versatility	Ease of use	Supported digital assistant(s)	Info display
SMART SPEAKERS *Continued*							
JBL Link Portable	54	$180	●	●	▲	Google	
Sonos Roam	54	$180	●	▲	▲	Alexa, Google	
Google Nest Hub (2nd Gen)	54	$100	▼	▲	▲	Google	●
Amazon Echo Dot (4th Gen)	53	$50	▼	▲▲	▲	Alexa	
Facebook Portal+ 14"	53	$300	●	▲	▲	Alexa, Portal	●
Amazon Echo Dot (3rd Gen)	53	$40	▼	▲▲	▲	Alexa	
Facebook Portal+	53	$280	●	●	▲	Alexa, Portal	●
Facebook Portal Go	52	$200	●	●	▲	Alexa, Portal	●
JBL Link 10	50	$180	▼	●	▲	Google	
iHome AV14	50	$100	▼	●	▲	Alexa	
Facebook Portal Mini	50	$95	▼	●	▲	Alexa	●
Apple HomePod Mini	50	$100	▼	●	▲	Siri	
Amazon Echo Show 5 (2nd Gen)	49	$85	▼	▲	▲▲	Alexa	●
Lenovo Smart Display 8"	48	$220	▼	●	▲	Google	●
Lenovo Smart Clock 2 w/ Wireless Charging Dock	45	$90	▼	▲	▲	Google	●
Google Nest Mini (2nd Gen)	44	$50	▼	▲	▲	Google	
Lenovo Smart Clock Essential	44	$50	▼	▲	▲	Google	●
Lenovo Smart Clock	42	$60	▼	▲	▲	Google	●
iLive Platinum Concierge	38	$80	▼	●	▲	Alexa	

HOW WE TEST: The **Overall Score** is based on sound quality, versatility, and ease of use. **Sound quality**, which is the most heavily weighted, assesses how a speaker compares with top-rated reference models in our dedicated listening lab. **Versatility** takes into account a speaker's variety of features and connections. **Ease of use** evaluates both the setup and use of the speaker, including its physical controls and its smartphone app. **Info display** indicates models that have some level of tabletlike functionality, with or without touch-screen capability.

POOR ▼▼ ▼ ● ▲ ▲▲ EXCELLENT | ✓ RECOMMENDED | $ CR BEST BUY

Save More Waste Less

HOME EDITION

Want to live a more sustainable life but think it requires too much effort—or just don't know where to start? We've found dozens of simple steps you can take to be more green and also save money—a lot of it—around the house.

Look for CR's Green Choice label in our ratings. This designation identifies the products that have a lower environmental impact. So far we've added the label to our vehicle and washing machine ratings; we'll be adding it to other categories over time.

ILLUSTRATION BY LISA SHEEHAN

3 Easy Green Moves to Make Now

Switch to a reusable coffee pod filter and save:

$393

PAGE 24

+

Install a bidet seat. If you use 50 percent less TP, you can save:

$231

PAGE 26

+

Reduce the temp on your water heater from 140° F to 120° F and save up to:

$453

PAGE 29

=

$1,077

Total yearly savings*

*Based on a two-person household.

30% of Americans have **installed a more water-efficient appliance,** such as a dishwasher or washer, in the past year
26% installed a low-flow showerhead or faucet // **25%** installed a low-flow toilet // **5%** installed a rain-collection barrel*

Make your own sparkling water.

DIY carbonation can save you cash. Based on our calculations, a family that drinks 5 liters of seltzer a week and switches from store-bought to making their own would save $195 over two years—and spare 520 single-use plastic bottles. (This is based on using the highly rated ***SodaStream Terra soda maker, $80*** at some retailers, and CO_2 cartridges that average $22.50 each.) To calculate savings based on your own consumption, go to **CR.org/sodamaker**.

Embrace a kinder K-Cup.

Try trading single-use coffee pods for a reusable K-Cup filter. Keurig makes its own, but you can also get one from ***DéliBrü, Di Oro, Fill N Save, Maxware***, or ***Perfect Pod***. And you'll save big: The average price for a pound of ground coffee in the U.S. breaks down to about 18 cents a cup. Compare that with Keurig K-Cups, which cost roughly 74 cents a cup. Based on two coffee drinkers enjoying one cup every morning for a year, you'll save almost $400 with the reusable filter, which can go into the dishwasher when you're done.

→ Grabbing coffee out? Starbucks and Peet's, among other coffee chains and shops, offer a small discount if you bring your own mug.

Give leftovers new life.

Taking leftovers home from a restaurant reduces food waste and maximizes the value of your dollars spent dining out. If you're ditching the doggie bag because certain foods aren't as good reheated, know that we found that an air fryer, such as the ✔ ***Gourmia GAF686***, can bring even loaded nachos, tacos, and other foods typically thought impossible to resuscitate back to their original glory.

How I Compost in My Apartment

PERRY SANTANACHOTE
CR sustainability editor

Composting breaks down fruits and veggies into a nutrient-rich fertilizer—and keeps food scraps out of landfills. I have zero outdoor space and can drop off food scraps for composting at my local farmers market, but I wanted to see if I could compost in my apartment. I tried several indoor options, including the Vitamix FoodCycler, $400; the Lomi Home Composter, $499; and a few vermicompost bins, where worms do the work. (See my reviews at **CR.org/composters**.) The ***Simplehuman Compost Caddy, $50***, which I was already using to collect food scraps, proved to be best: It fits in the freezer and keeps smells and bugs at bay. I then schlep the scraps to the market, happy to know that they are going back into the ground here in New York. Some cities offer a drop-off or pickup service, and commercial composting companies will pick up residential food waste for a fee. My sister uses one and gets bags of compost in return.

Top-Rated

WATER FILTER PITCHERS

If you buy purified bottled water because you aren't happy with what comes out of your tap, try a high-quality water filter pitcher, which can save you money while reducing waste. Take the top-rated ✔ *Brita Rapids Stream*. For a $25 investment, this pitcher filters up to 40 gallons of water per cartridge (replacements cost $7 each). That's about equal to the amount of water in 303 plastic bottles (16.9-ounce), or more than twenty-five 12-packs.

✔ **Brita Rapids Stream OB55** $25 *(shown)*	81
Pur Ultimate With Lead Reduction PPT711W $30	76
Kirkland Signature Water Filtration System $25	69

*Source: Nationally representative CR survey of 2,240 U.S. adults conducted in March 2022.

Cut Back on Food Waste

The average U.S. household throws out about a third of the food it acquires, to the tune of an estimated $1,866 per year. (A fair amount of food packaging ends up in your kitchen trash, too, even when you recycle right.)

Here are easy ways to waste less.

➔ **Adopt a "FIFO" rule.** That's first in, first out. Whether in your pantry or freezer, pull items from the back. That way there's a better chance you'll use older (often forgotten) items before they expire or go bad.

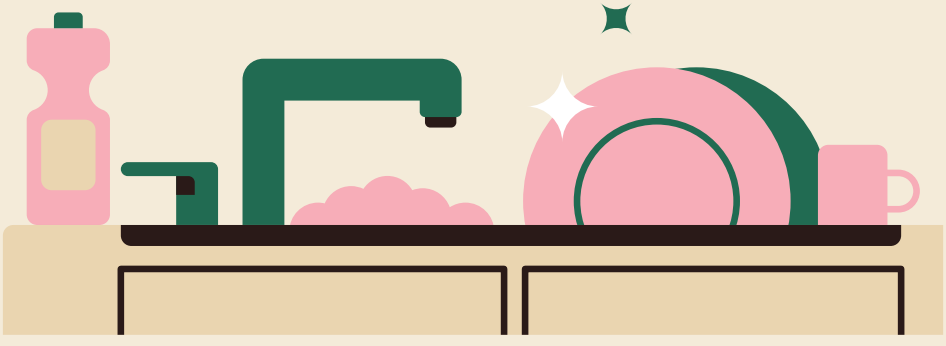
➔ **Put your pantry to work.** Spend a week cooking primarily with ingredients from your pantry to thin out older provisions.

➔ **Freeze what you won't get through.** Bread keeps in the freezer for up to three months. Freeze just-past-their-prime bananas, berries, spinach, and more to use in smoothies. Think of leftovers, frozen in individual servings, as meal prep.

➔ **Build a freezer file.** Keep an itemized list on your phone of what goes into your freezer. Plan meals around it so that you don't have to toss forgotten food when it's freezer-burned. Label and date the items you freeze.

➔ **Don't take package "best by" dates as gospel.** "It's easy to interpret them as 'throw out on this date,' but those dates are voluntarily put on food packages by manufacturers to indicate when the food is of best quality," says Amy Keating, RD, a nutritionist at CR. "Foods are often safe for consumption after that date. Just examine for signs of spoilage, and when in doubt, throw it out."

GROW YOUR OWN HERBS Trader Joe's sells cut basil for $2.69—or a potted basil plant, $4, which could provide a steady supply of the aromatic herb with a little sun and weekly watering. "Indoors, with south-facing sun, you can grow basil, thyme, mint, oregano, rosemary—to name a few—on a windowsill," says Karen Washington, co-owner of Rise & Root Farm in Chester, N.Y.



Get the Dishes Clean Using Less Energy and Water

If You Hand-Wash

Use the water-efficient two-basin method. Scrape away solids, then soak and scrub dirty dishes in a sink filled with hot water and a few drops of dish soap. Follow by rinsing in a basin of cold water.

If You Use a Dishwasher

Don't prerinse. Unless you have superhard water or an ineffective dishwasher, you can skip rinsing the dishes before loading them. And if you make sure to run full loads, you'll save water, energy, and detergent.

Try a cheaper detergent. The top performers in CR's tests tend to be single-dose packs; you might find that a less expensive gel works just fine.

Keep your dishwasher working better, longer. Built-up mineral scale and food residue can diminish your machine's cleaning abilities. If your dishwasher has a filter, clean it whenever performance dips. And for all models, run an empty load with a cleaner, such as *Affresh Dishwasher Cleaner, $9*, or citric acid a few times a year.

Need to replace your dishwasher? Bosch dominates the top of our ratings; other top-rated options cost far more than the three picks at right. We're adding our Green Choice designation—which IDs the most eco-friendly models—soon. Go to **CR.org/dishwashers** for more.

88

✔ **Bosch Ascenta SHE3AR72UC** $550

88

✔ **Bosch Ascenta SHX3AR75UC** $700

83

✔ **Bosch 100 Series SHEM3AY55N** $650

ILLUSTRATIONS BY CHRIS VAN ROOYEN

POOR — EXCELLENT | ✔ RECOMMENDED

Extend the life of your clothes.

People typically keep a garment for about two years. Extending that to three years, by taking good care of your clothing, reduces its carbon, water, and waste footprint by 20 to 30 percent–and you'll save because you're not having to replace items so frequently. To get more wear out of clothes:

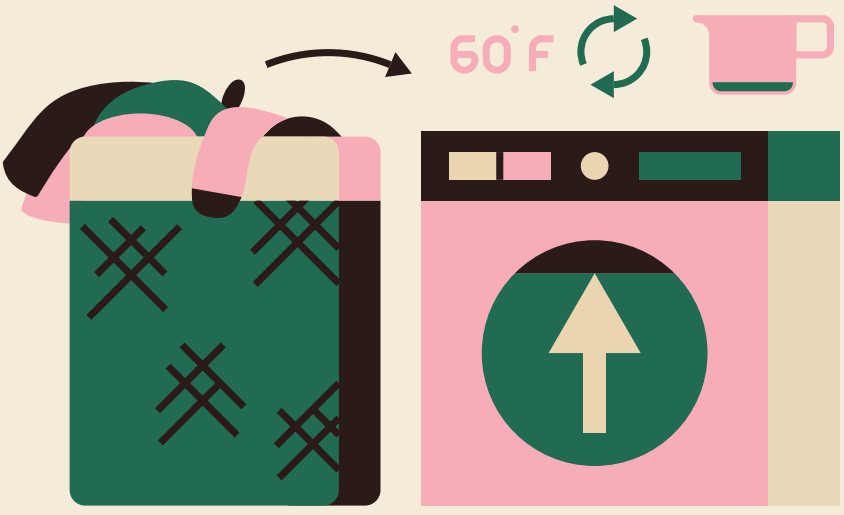
➔ *Wash garments less often and/or use shorter or more gentle wash cycles.*

➔ *Try the soak function. It fills the tub and lets the detergent work without much (or any) agitation before it runs a shorter wash-and-spin cycle. Decreased agitation reduces wear and tear on clothes.*

➔ *Use mesh bags to protect delicate fabrics.*

Pass your clothes on.

When you're done with a garment and it's still in good condition, consider selling it through a local consignment store, or try an online option, such as ThredUp. If the item's worn out, search the database at earth911.com for nearby textile donation sites. Alternatively, retailers such as H&M and brands including Levi's and Adidas offer coupons or other incentives for your used apparel.



Streamline Laundry Day

Keep it cold. Washing with cold water can save you about $66 a year, according to Energy Star. "Reserve hot water for items you want to sanitize when someone is sick in the house," says CR laundry expert Rich Handel.

Decrease the detergent. Our tests reveal that you typically need to use only about 1.5 ounces of detergent to get clothes clean. If your clothes are heavily soiled, increase the amount slightly.

Try a cheaper detergent. A family that washes five loads per week can save more than $79 per year using *Kirkland Signature Ultra Clean Liquid,* 11 cents per load, compared with Tide Hygienic Clean Heavy Duty 10X, 44 cents per load. Both earn Overall Scores of Very Good in our tests.

Opt for the automatic dryer cycle. This setting, which generally uses a moisture sensor or thermostat, can save energy and extend the life of your fabrics by reducing the chances of overdrying. (You can save even more energy by line- or hang-drying.)

Skip unnecessary extras. Fabric softeners, dryer sheets, and scent boosters cost $9 to $17 or more per container and leave residue behind.

When it's time to replace your washer, look for a Green Choice. To assign this eco-friendly designation, we consider not only the water and energy a model uses but also packaging, shipping, reliability, and more. Here are three highly rated Green Choice washers.

87
Front-Loader
LG WM3400CW
$850

81
Front-Loader
Samsung WF45R6100AW $695

83
HE Top-Loader
LG WT7800CW
$1,050

USE WAY LESS TP A bidet seat attaches to your toilet and spritzes your backside. This post-potty rinse uses more water (in addition to your standard flush) but saves on toilet paper. "Our toilet paper consumption has gone down by half," one bidet fan reported to CR's user experience and research team. Another said they used 80 percent less TP after installing a bidet seat. In CR's evaluation with more than two dozen bidet owners, the *Brondell SimpleSpa Thinline, from $27,* was among the favorites.

POOR EXCELLENT | RECOMMENDED | CR BEST BUY | GREEN CHOICE

48% of Americans have **gotten clothing secondhand** // **42%** have brought home used furniture
29% have obtained used electronics // **21%** have acquired used exercise equipment*

How I Quit Paper Towels

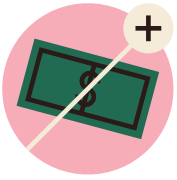
PAUL HOPE CR home editor

I confess, I was once a chronic overuser of paper towels—for wiping the counters, drying my hands, and cleaning up spills. It got so bad during the pandemic that my family of five was burning through about 20 rolls a month. To wean ourselves, we bought 60 thick white cotton washcloths at a cost of about $37 and put them in an easy-to-access bin on the kitchen counter. Then I stashed the disposable roll in a harder-to-reach place, reserving it for essential use only, like cleaning a counter with hot, soapy water after cutting up chicken. (I'm grossed out at the thought of a washcloth, potentially swimming with salmonella, mixing with my clothes in the hamper.) We have a few extra washcloths in our laundry loads, but we've whittled our paper-towel habit down to just one to two rolls per month. I used to buy a 12-pack of Bounty double rolls for 25 bucks at Home Depot once or twice a month. Now that same pack lasts us six months.

Switch to LEDs.

A new federal rule requiring lightbulbs to meet higher efficiency standards means that energy-wasting incandescent bulbs might not be an option for long. But it doesn't pay to wait: We compared the energy use of a 100-watt equivalent Philips-branded "eco" incandescent (halogen) bulb with the energy use of compact fluorescent (CFL), LED, and smart LED bulbs. The incandescent uses 72 watts, the CFL uses 23 watts, and both LEDs use 14.5 watts. The difference in yearly energy cost between the incandescent and LED bulbs is about $7 per bulb. So if you replace 10 incandescents (the average home uses more than 60 bulbs), you'll save about $70 in yearly energy costs. Plus, LEDs last 14 to 17 years longer.

→ Installing a low-flow showerhead with the EPA's WaterSense label can save 2,700 gallons a year, or about $16 in average annual water costs.



Join a Buy Nothing group.

Online Buy Nothing groups let you give appliances, lawn-care equipment, and anything else you no longer want to people in your community instead of sending them to the landfill. Everything is offered free and you can post a request for anything you need (just not cash or anything illegal). Search Facebook Groups for your local Buy Nothing group or go to freecycle.org. (Plan a handoff in a public location or parking lot; some police stations even have spots designated for that purpose.)

Top-Rated

WATER-SAVING TOILETS

Replacing old toilets with WaterSense models could save more than $140 a year on your water bill, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. Federal standards require that new toilets use no more than 1.6 gallons per flush; those that qualify for the EPA's WaterSense label use only 1.28 gallons. "In our tests, many WaterSense models perform just as well as—if not better than—some higher-gallon toilets," says CR test engineer Chris Regan. Here are three options.

American Standard Champion 747BA107SC.020 $250 *(shown)* — **77**

Delta Turner C43908-WH $170 — **70**

Glacier Bay N2428RB/ N2428T $90 — **71**

*Source: Nationally representative CR survey of 2,240 U.S. adults conducted in March 2022.

28% of homeowners have **installed a smart thermostat to limit energy use** in the past year // **20%** added insulation to use less heating and A/C // **15%** installed new windows // **6%** installed a heat pump // **4%** installed solar panels*

Top-Rated

ORGANIC MATTRESSES

Get more life from the mattress you have by rotating it or flipping it (depending on manufacturer guidance) at least twice a year. And follow our cleaning advice at **CR.org/cleanmattress**. When it's time to replace it, don't be fooled by terms such as "natural" or even "organic." The two most meaningful standards are the Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS) or Global Organic Latex Standard (GOLS) certification. These three options carry one or both.

Innerspring
✔ **Avocado Green** $1,600 *(shown)* — **85**

Foam
$ **Sleep on Latex Pure Green Firm** $1,000 — **80**

Innerspring
✔ **Birch by Helix Natural** $1,300 — **73**

Find drafts and seal 'em up.

A drafty house can drive up your energy costs. To find less obvious leaks, hold a lit incense stick near potential problem spots, like windows and doors. If the smoke dissipates, you probably have a leak. Use caulk to fill gaps between stationary features, such as door and window frames, and use weather stripping to seal what moves, such as doors and windows.

Give your A/C an assist.

In summer, keep curtains closed when you can, to block warming rays. Run a ceiling fan and you can raise the A/C thermostat by 4° F and feel just as comfortable, per the Department of Energy.

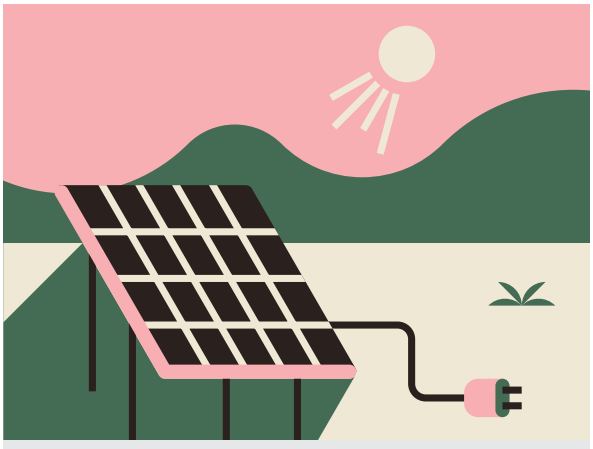
Save on home heating.

A programmable thermostat can automatically adjust the temp when you're away or asleep. For step-by-step instructions, go to **CR.org/programthermostat**. According to Energy Star, a smart thermostat, such as the ✔ ***Honeywell Home T5+, $120***, can lower your heating and cooling bills by an average of 8 percent, or $50 per year.

Consider a heat pump.

Electric heat pumps can chop your heating-related carbon emissions by 40 percent or more compared with a gas furnace, according to a study from the University of California, Davis. Thanks to new technology, they now work in not only warmer climates but also colder ones. Homeowners who switch from oil or propane heat are likely to save money, too—especially if you live somewhere with tax incentives or cash rebates. Check dsireusa.org for programs in your area.

→ You can save up to 3 percent on your utility bill for every degree you raise your thermostat's set temperature above 72° F this summer.



How I Went Solar—Without the Panels

SHANIKA WHITEHURST
CR sustainability testing/research associate director

At the height of the pandemic, our household electricity bill reached $200-plus nearly every month, so my wife and I wanted to install solar panels on our Maryland home. The provider told her our roof was too shady and recommended community solar as an alternative. We decided to give it a try. Our electricity is now generated by a solar farm, rather than by the utility company. Since signing up last September, our energy costs have been significantly less, thanks to the low cost of solar and credits we receive for excess solar energy we don't use. We can revert to the main utility company if we ever want to, but with these savings? That's not likely to happen.

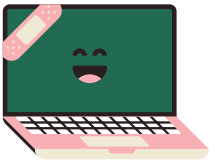
***Source:** Nationally representative CR survey of 2,240 U.S. adults conducted in March 2022.

Turn down your water heater.

The EPA estimates that you could shave between 4 and 22 percent off your annual energy bill by dialing down your water heater from 140° F to 120° F. That could mean savings of more than $400 a year. But check the manual or with the manufacturer to confirm the proper setting for yours–and know that electric tank water heaters should be set at a high enough temperature to prevent bacteria growth.

Waste less printer ink.

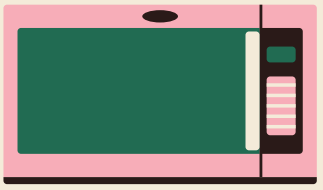
Few things in life are less pleasing to purchase than printer ink. Ounce for ounce, it routinely exceeds gasoline and even Dom Pérignon Champagne in price. To get more mileage from each cartridge, use the more frugal draft mode on your printer for recipes and other items that don't require picture-perfect presentation. Consider a font change, too: CR testers once found that ink goes 27 percent further with Times New Roman than with Arial.



Bring a worn-out laptop back to life.

Chromebooks use a cloud-based operating system that reduces the need for pricey processors and built-in storage. Free software called *CloudReady* makes it pretty easy to give an old laptop new life as a functional Chromebook. For step-by-step instructions, go to **CR.org/oldlaptop**.

CONSIDER BUYING A USED APPLIANCE "It takes a little legwork and a willingness to live with a mismatched kitchen or laundry suite, but in return you can find a top-of-line appliance for a fraction of what it would cost new," says Jim Nanni, director of appliance testing at CR. You can also purchase used at online marketplaces and yard sales, but a used-appliance store or a repair shop might offer lower prices and a warranty, which is particularly important when buying used.

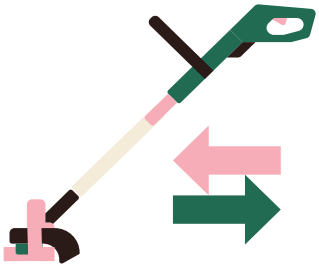


Pick Appliances That Will Last

When you need to replace a major appliance or you're outfitting your kitchen or laundry room with a new suite, choosing a reliable brand can help you avoid problem-prone machines—and the cost of repairs. Our fourth annual Brand Reliability Rankings show how reliable a brand is relative to others, across multiple appliance types. The results are based on data CR collected from our member surveys covering more than 669,500 kitchen and laundry appliances purchased new between 2011 and 2021. Fifteen of the 29 brands in this year's rankings earn a favorable average predicted brand reliability score. For the complete list, go to **CR.org/appliancereliability**.

	Average predicted brand reliability score	Refrigerators	Dishwashers	Ranges	Cooktops	Electric wall ovens	OTR microwave ovens	Washing machines	Clothes dryers
Speed Queen	88							⏫	⏫
LG	76	🔼	➖	🔼	⏫	🔼	🔼	⏫	⏫
Roper	74							⏫	🔼
Sub-Zero/Wolf	71	🔼		➖	➖	⏫			
Signature Kitchen Suite	70	➖	➖		⏫	🔼	🔼		
Miele	69	➖	⏫	🔽	🔽	⏫		🔼	⏫
Thermador	68	⏫	⏫	➖	🔼	➖			
GE	67	🔼	➖	⏫	🔼	⏫	🔼	➖	➖
Beko	66		➖					🔼	
Bosch	66	➖	⏫	⏫	⏫	➖	➖	➖	➖
Kenmore	63	🔼	➖	🔼	🔼	➖	🔼	➖	🔼
Whirlpool	63	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	➖	⏫	➖	➖
Café	62	➖	➖	🔼	➖	⏫	➖		
Frigidaire	62	➖	➖	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	➖	➖
Ikea	62		🔼		➖	🔽	⏫		

22% of Americans **try to minimize water use in the lawn or garden** (like watering at night or using plants that require less water)*



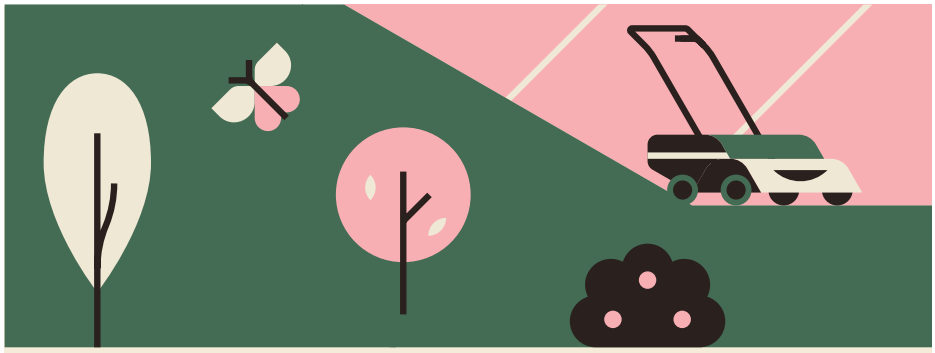
Switch to battery-powered lawn tools.

"Every year we test more battery lawn tools, and every year we find fewer reasons to recommend gas tools," says Misha Kollontai, CR test engineer for outdoor power equipment. Lawn tools with two-stroke engines can put out 20 to almost 300 times the emissions of a car on an hourly basis, according to Simon Mui at the Natural Resources Defense Council. Battery mowers, trimmers, and other tools emit nothing and are cheaper to run than gas models. Purchase electric tools that run on the same battery platform: Buy two tools with the battery and the rest without. (You'll save about 30 percent on each lawn tool you buy without the battery.) You can charge one battery while using the other, so you'll never need to stop a job to recharge. Here's a suite of tools built around the top-rated Ego LM 2135, pictured at right.

String Trimmer
Ego ST1502SA $200 — 92

Leaf Blower
Ego LB6504 $300 — 80

Chainsaw
Ego CS1804 $350 — 82



Make Your Lawn and Garden More Planet-Friendly

1. Plant drought-tolerant, native perennials. In addition to needing little watering, some are fire-resistant. Others grow deep roots to prevent erosion. Find region-specific recommendations at epa.gov/watersense/what-plant.

2. Install a smart sprinkler control. The *RainMachine Touch HD-12, $240*, schedules its cycles based on the weather forecast, so you're not paying to water when the lawn doesn't need it.

3. Use a mulching mower. It distributes tiny grass clippings, which decompose and fertilize your lawn. In autumn, it shreds and spreads fallen leaves.

The mowers below earn Excellent ratings in our mulching test. They're also energy-efficient and quiet, and they don't pollute. Not sure if a battery mower will cut it? Use our interactive tool at **CR.org/batterymower** to see when you'd break even vs. gas, based on how long you spend mowing and the current price of gas.

Battery Push Mower
Ego LM 2135 $600

Battery Push Mower
Ryobi RY401170VNM $330

Battery Self-Propelled Mower
Kobalt (Lowe's) KSPM 1040A-03 $400

USE RECHARGEABLE BATTERIES RIGHT Yes, they cost twice as much (or more) as single-use batteries, but you can recharge them hundreds of times. To get the most savings, use rechargeables in devices that require frequent battery changes, such as your computer mouse and remote controls for toys, advises Shanika Whitehurst, CR's associate director of sustainability. Disposables are better for products with a low energy pull, such as smoke detectors, clocks, and your TV's remote control.

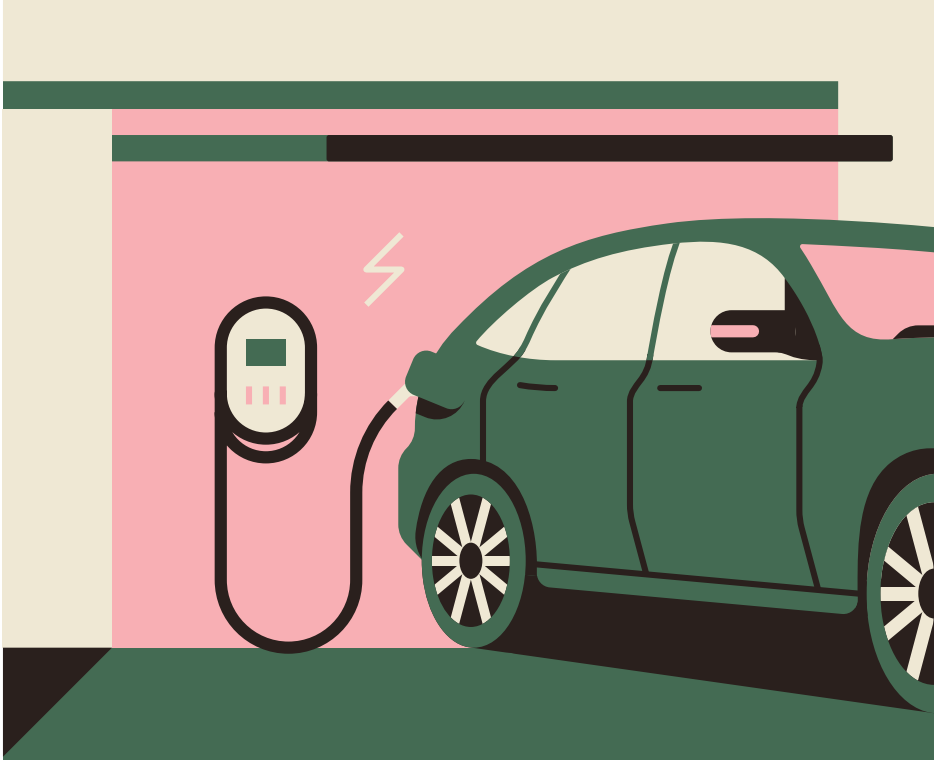
*Source: Nationally representative CR survey of 2,240 U.S. adults conducted in March 2022.

→ Prep ingredients before you fire up the grill, then set a timer to preheat for 10 minutes, which ensures good performance and guards against burning extra propane.

Light only the grill burners you need.

Think of your gas grill as a stove. You'd never turn on all the burners to boil pasta; likewise, use only the grill burners you need to fit whatever you're grilling. When you're in the market for a new grill, consider how many burners you typically use: Unless you're always feeding a crowd, a smaller grill–such as the ***Nexgrill 720-1012, $165*** (shown above)–is likely to feed your household, plus a few guests, just fine. Many of the small gas grills in our ratings cost less than $200 and can hold up to 18 burger patties. Large grills with unused burners take longer to heat, wasting propane and generating more greenhouse gases every time you cook.

—Reporting by Tracy Anderman, Daniel Bortz, Tanya Christian, Mary Farrell, Keith Flamer, Paul Hope, Liam McCabe, Laura Murphy, Chris Raymond, Perry Santanachote, Tobie Stanger, and Daniel Wroclawski



Installing a Charger for an EV? Think Ahead.

Switching away from fossil fuels is almost always good for the environment—and often your bank account, too. If you're planning a project that requires an electrician—such as upgrading your garage outlet to accommodate charging an electric vehicle—think about any other electrical jobs you might have on the horizon. For the charger, consider buying one that plugs into a 240-volt outlet (more specifically, a NEMA 14-50 type): They're easier to replace than hardwired models and are also portable. The electrician who handles the garage could also prewire a connection for a heat pump (see more on page 28). Or if you're swapping a gas stove for induction and plan to get an EV soon, get wired for both at the same time. You'll usually save by bundling multiple tasks into one appointment, even if it's just the $25 to $75 they typically charge to travel to your home. And a bigger job might make an in-demand electrician more likely to take your gig in the first place. The biggest investment of all of this, of course, is an EV—but it costs less to maintain than a conventional car, and you'll save thousands of dollars on fuel costs. Here are three options.

Toyota RAV4 Prime Plug-In Hybrid

88

PRICE RANGE: $40,300-$43,625
FUEL SAVINGS OVER 5 YEARS: $7,000*

Kia Niro EV

88

PRICE RANGE: $39,990-$44,650
FUEL SAVINGS OVER 5 YEARS: $9,000*

Ford Mustang Mach-E

82

PRICE RANGE: $43,895-$61,995
FUEL SAVINGS OVER 5 YEARS: $8,500*

*Fuel savings estimates are via fueleconomy.gov, compared with a 2022 gas vehicle that gets 27 mpg.

There are many more ways you can cut back on waste and save money in the process. **TELL US:** *What smart strategies has your family adopted? Where have you seen the biggest savings? Share your best tips with us—and other readers—at* ***CR.org/wasteless.***

Why You May Need to Update Your Will Now

Changes in tax law and also in your personal life may mean that yours needs to be updated. Here, the easiest (and smartest) ways to do it.

BY **CARLA FRIED** ■■■ ILLUSTRATIONS BY **KLAWE RZECZY**

JOHN T. MIDGETT, an estate planning attorney in Virginia Beach, Va., recently met new clients who shared that they hadn't eyeballed their will since their daughter was 2 years old. She's now 54.

"Just a few things have happened in their family's life since then—and tax law has changed a lot too," says Midgett, president-elect of the National Association of Estate Planners & Councils (NAEPC).

Even if it has been less than 50 years since you last looked at your estate plan, you're going to want to update it, not just because you may have some changes in your family situation but also because federal estate law has been altered, especially in the past 12 years. For example, you'll want to revise your will if any of the following apply to you:

- **You drew it up before 2001**. The amount you can leave your heirs without paying federal tax has increased significantly, from $675,000 in 2001 to more than $12 million in 2022.
- **You've moved to a new state** where the estate tax exemption is higher (Connecticut's, for example, is $9.1 million) or lower (Oregon's is only $1 million).

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■ **You got married, divorced,** are now in a committed relationship, or have children who are now adults.
■ **Your wishes have changed.** You need new beneficiaries or new people to manage your finances and medical care.

Whatever your reasons for updating (or if you don't have a will as part of your plan, like 72 percent of American adults ages 45 to 59 and 37 percent of those 60 and older, according to an April 2022 CR nationally representative survey of 2,224 adults) you'll need to address these four parts:

1) The will (or trust), which distributes assets to your heirs.
2) A durable power of attorney (DPOA), which gives the person you name the ability to manage your affairs if you become incapacitated.
3) A healthcare proxy, which allows your designee to serve as your healthcare advocate.
4) An advance directive (i.e., a living will), which details your wishes should you be involved in a medical emergency.

The Good News About Estate Taxes

■ **Federal estate taxes are lower than they used to be.** There's no question that estate tax exemptions—the amount you can leave people without it being taxed—have increased substantially in the past two decades. A tax bill passed in 2010 made the exemption higher on a national level and allowed spouses who survive their partner to inherit the deceased partner's exemption, effectively doubling their own exemption. (This is scheduled to shift again when the current law expires in 2026, but the exemption will revert to a still generous $6 million or so per person.)

■ **Some state tax rates have changed.** There have been a number of increases—and decreases. (Twelve states plus the District of Columbia currently have estate taxes.) Most state tax exemptions are ample. For example, the 2022 exemption in Connecticut is $9.1 million, Maryland's is $5 million, and New York's is $6.1 million.

A few states, though, have much lower limits: Massachusetts and Oregon exempt only the first $1 million in an estate, and Minnesota's exemption is $3 million. These numbers may still sound pretty high, but keep in mind that your estate includes the value of your house, retirement accounts, and life insurance, and all of those can add up quickly. So you may need to talk to an estate planning attorney about ways to protect your assets if you live in one of these states or are planning to move or retire to one.

■ **There are new rules for inherited retirement accounts.** As of 2020, anyone other than a spouse who inherits a 401(k) or traditional IRA has to withdraw every penny within 10 years, potentially landing them with a big tax bill. To avoid this, you can move money out of those accounts today—paying the tax on withdrawals yourself—thus reducing the inheritance tax burden on your beneficiaries. You can then use the funds to buy a life insurance policy or give annual gifts to your beneficiaries while you're still alive. But Midgett recommends consulting a tax professional before withdrawing funds from a qualified retirement plan.

PHOTOS, PREVIOUS SPREAD AND THIS SPREAD: GETTY IMAGES (9)

How to Get Your Update Going

■ **First, decide whether you'll DIY or hire an estate planner.** In general, you can do it yourself if you know your estate won't reach the limits of federal or state tax exemptions and you don't have complex family dynamics—say, a blended family or relatives likely to challenge your will. This is the least expensive path to take. You can even handle your update free at online sites such as FreeWill, a service that guides you through the process of creating a legally binding will. (CR partners with FreeWill as a resource for CR members.) You can also pay a fee—starting at $99 for LegalZoom and $200 for Trust & Will—to do most of the work yourself but with some ability to ask questions or have an attorney review your plan, depending on the package you choose.

But there's a downside to using certain DIY sites. LegalZoom, for example, allows free updates only for a year if you buy its $249 Estate Plan Bundle (not a more basic plan); after that you'll have to pay for changes. Trust & Will has a subscription service ($19 per month) that allows revisions anytime.

■ **Weigh the benefits of expert help.** Hiring an estate attorney will cost much more ($2,000 to $3,000, according to Midgett). But if the value of your estate is higher than federal or state tax exemption levels, it's probably money well spent. A pro with expert knowledge of federal and state taxes could save your heirs a lot of money in taxes down the road and give you valuable peace of mind.

One thing you might want an attorney to handle is the creation of a trust, which those with larger estates often need. Having a living revocable trust (the "living" part refers to the fact that while you're alive you can make changes whenever you want) means that your estate won't need to go through probate, the process of getting court approval for how to disperse your assets, which can take years and cost the estate thousands in court and attorney's fees. Setting up a trust is particularly important for unmarried partners, who generally have little or no inheritance rights in the eyes of the law. Establishing a trust can smooth the process of leaving assets to an unmarried partner by keeping the estate out of probate court, where other family members could challenge the provisions of the will, says Ruth Driscoll, an estate planning and probate lawyer in Elm Grove, Wis. While it's possible to create a trust using a DIY service, in most cases an estate lawyer will be better able to tailor one to your exact needs.

■ **Hire the right attorney.** Start with personal referrals, but the key qualifications to look for, Midgett says, are a license to practice law in your state; membership in an organization like the NAEPC or the American College of Trust and Estate Counsel, both of which require a high level of experience and expertise; and being an accredited estate planner, which indicates specialized knowledge of estate tax and planning issues.

Will Prep Steps

■ **Gather your estate details.** Before you start to fill out an online will-making questionnaire or meet with an estate lawyer, you'll need to get some key information together. This includes names and contact information for anyone involved in your plan, such as family members and other beneficiaries, executors, etc.; statements from your bank, investment and retirement accounts, and pensions; the types of life insurance policies you have and the amount they provide; the approximate value of your real estate holdings and any mortgages; any businesses you have an interest in; and, if possible, any inheritance you're expecting or charities you're planning to leave a bequest to.

One surprising fact: The beneficiaries you've named on each of your accounts will get the money—not people you name in your will. So if your ex-spouse is still the beneficiary listed on your pension, he or she will get the funds even if your will stipulates that your current spouse should inherit them.

■ **Assign executors and proxies.** This is a good time to think about your choice of an executor and power of attorney. Most people choose a family member, friend, or, less commonly, a trusted attorney or accountant, says Patrick Hicks, general counsel of Trust & Will. They should be people who are at ease with financial matters. So while your 20-year-old child could legally be your executor, he might not be experienced enough to handle your affairs. Hicks also advises picking one or two backup executors.

When assigning a healthcare proxy, pick someone who can make a difficult personal decision for you if necessary, usually a spouse, close family member, or friend, not an attorney or accountant.

Keep in mind that if you're not married to your partner—and you want them to make decisions for you in a healthcare emergency—you'll need to name them as your healthcare proxy by filling out a healthcare proxy form. You may also need to complete a Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) authorization form, which allows healthcare providers to discuss your case with your partner. If you want them to be able to make financial decisions on your behalf, give them power of attorney.

Similarly, if you have unmarried children who are 18 and older, you may want them to make you their healthcare proxy and sign a HIPAA authorization form. You may need both documents to be allowed to help in a medical emergency or see their medical records. (This varies by state.) These forms are available online; just search for your state and "HIPAA authorization," "healthcare proxy," or "advance directive." If you're working with an attorney, he or she can draw up the documents. Either way, they need to be signed and in some cases witnessed and notarized. (Again, rules vary by state; a DIY site will provide instructions.) Most states allow some form of online notarization, so you may be able to get this done from home.

■ **Complete your plan.** Once you've gathered all this intel and assigned key roles, creating your will is easy. Using a DIY site like FreeWill may take you only 20 minutes or so to get the job done. If you're working with an attorney, expect at least a couple of meetings. (And generally speaking, most of these can be virtual meets.) Either way, your final document will need to be signed, witnessed by two people who won't inherit anything under the terms of the will, and notarized to make it legal and binding. (Requirements and regulations for witnesses and notarization vary by state.) Your attorney's office should have witnesses and a notary on-site.

PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES (6)

What to Do With Your New Plan

- **Keep your documents safe.** Store the original signed copy of your will in a fireproof safe at home and tell your executor and family where it is and how to access it.
- **Share with your team.** Give printed copies or electronic files to your executor, your designees for financial and healthcare powers of attorney, and anyone you have given HIPAA authorization. Your healthcare proxy should also have a copy of your advance directive. Midgett says it's wise to store and share all of these documents in digital form, so someone who's acting on your behalf can pull up a copy from their smartphone or laptop in any kind of emergency. Also, be sure to file your healthcare proxy and advance directive with your primary physician's office. (You'll want to have healthcare proxies at the ready in the event your chosen caregiver needs to make quick medical decisions.)
- **Have a backup strategy.** Consider giving a copy of your plan to an additional person in case your executor can't be reached in an emergency–and make sure your family knows who your executor is. If an attorney created your plan, he or she should keep a copy of it on file. Make sure your executor and beneficiaries have the contact info for your estate attorney, too.

If you're storing your documents in an encrypted, password-protected cloud service or a home safe, make sure you update anyone who needs the password or code. Otherwise, you'll undermine your central goal: making it easy for people you trust to care for you and your estate.

Want Your Facebook Page to Survive You?

YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA accounts on Facebook and Instagram can live forever–unlike you. That may not be what you actually want. You probably have dozens of password-protected accounts you use to pay bills, send email, store photos, and more. But if your loved ones don't have access to those accounts, they won't be able to manage your affairs after you're no longer here to handle them. Here's how to make that easier for them while still keeping your information secure.

Use a password manager.

A password manager can securely share the log-in for your accounts with your family, executor, or trusted friend. You can also share encrypted notes, files, and other information. This means you could use a folder in your password manager to store your will and other important documents, then give limited guest access to your executor, an accountant, or a lawyer. In a recent CR test of password managers, 1Password ($60 a year for up to five family members) scored highest for usability, data privacy, and security.

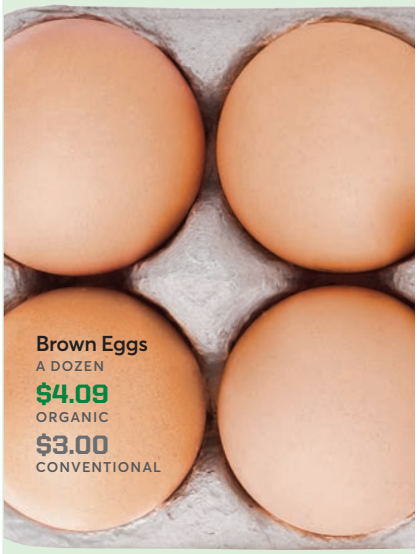
Designate a legacy contact for online accounts.

Google, Facebook, and Apple offer the option to assign someone else to manage your accounts (or delete them) if you're no longer here to do so. For Google Drive, Gmail, Photos, and other Google apps, this is called "Inactive Account Manager." For Facebook and Apple, it's called "Legacy Contact."

Detail your wishes in your will.

For digital accounts that don't have a legacy contact setting, it's best to add a clause in your will or trust specifying that you want a specific person or people to have access to your digital property. The clause can explain how you'd like everything from email to social media accounts to personal websites to be managed. For example, you can specify that you want email accounts deleted, websites shut down, and photos stored on a hard drive or shared with family.

—Melanie Pinola



Brown Eggs
A DOZEN
$4.09
ORGANIC
$3.00
CONVENTIONAL

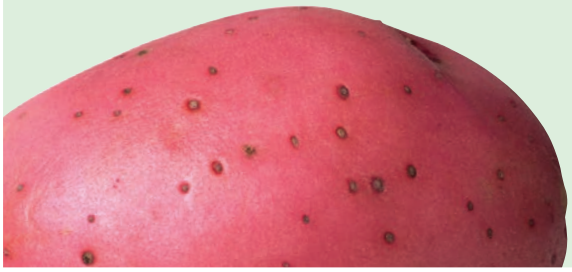
Boneless Rib-Eye Steak
PER POUND
$19.20
ORGANIC
$12.67
CONVENTIONAL

Romaine Lettuce
PER HEAD
$1.82
ORGANIC
$1.49
CONVENTIONAL

Butter
1 POUND
$7.02
ORGANIC
$3.95
CONVENTIONAL

PHOTOS, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: GETTY IMAGES (6); ADOBE STOCK

All price data is from the USDA's Weekly Advertised Retail Prices reports of May 13, 2022, with the exception of eggs (May 19, 2022), organic boneless rib-eye (April 11, 2022), conventional boneless rib-eye (May 19, 2022), and organic red potatoes (April 29, 2022).



Red Potatoes
3-POUND BAG
$2.99
ORGANIC
$3.99
CONVENTIONAL

Yellow Crookneck Squash
PER POUND
$2.49
ORGANIC
$1.44
CONVENTIONAL

ORGANIC FOOD ON A BUDGET

OUR EXPERT ADVICE CAN HELP YOU DECIDE WHAT'S MOST IMPORTANT TO BUY ORGANIC AND HOW TO SAVE MONEY WHEN YOU DO

BY JANET LEE

SUE SCHAEFER, 57, of Lee's Summit, Mo., is facing a conundrum. "I'm a thrifty shopper, but I prefer to buy organic," she says. "I just feel better when I eat organic." Because organic products are usually more expensive than their conventional counterparts, she heads to less-pricey stores that sell organic food. Even so, inflation is exacting a toll. "We used to buy organic eggs when it was just a dollar difference, but now it's several dollars difference."

With overall food prices up almost 9 percent from the end of March 2021 to the end of March 2022, Schaefer isn't alone in eyeing her grocery list more carefully. In a nationally representative Consumer Reports survey of 2,224 U.S. adults in April, 43 percent of those who said they had bought organic food in the past are now doing so slightly or much less often than they used to.

There are ways to corral costs, however, such as making informed choices on what to buy organic and what to buy conventional. You can also find ways to trim prices when you do purchase organic groceries. For instance, the big-box and discount stores (like Aldi and Costco) that Schaefer often shops at may indeed offer lower prices on organics. Keep reading to find out how to pick wisely so that you can cushion the inflationary hit to your wallet and still get the biggest benefits of organic food for yourself and the planet.

Granny Smith Apples
3-POUND BAG
$7.99
ORGANIC
$3.96
CONVENTIONAL

WHAT YOU REALLY GET FROM ORGANIC FOOD

ORGANIC CAN BE a loaded term. "There's a lot of confusion about what it means," says Kathryn MacLean, RD, a dietitian with UC Davis Health Food and Nutrition Services in California. In CR's survey, 42 percent of Americans said they thought organic food was more nutritious, and 66 percent thought it was better at limiting their exposure to pesticides or fertilizers.

What's true? The rules for using the USDA Organic seal on food include no use of most synthetic pesticides and fertilizers. Those that are allowed are tightly regulated, permitted only when other methods have failed, and must be shown to be safe for people. Organic food is also grown without genetically modified organisms or the ionizing irradiation sometimes used for pest control. For meat, poultry, dairy, or eggs, animals are given only organic feed and raised without antibiotics or added hormones in "living areas that encourage the health and natural behaviors of animals," says a USDA fact sheet. But it can be tough to tell what's fact and what's myth when it comes to the benefits you may have heard about. Here's the lowdown on four.

IS ORGANIC HEALTHIER?

That depends. "In general, the protein, fat, and carbohydrates are the same as those in conventional foods," MacLean says. "The vitamin and mineral content changes are pretty negligible as well." A 2014 analysis of 343 studies, published in the British Journal of Nutrition (BJN), found that organic produce contained higher levels of disease-fighting antioxidants than conventional produce did. Other studies have found no significant differences.

Bringing produce, whether conventional or organic, from a distance can have a negative impact on nutrients, notes Mary Ellen Camire, PhD, a professor of food science and human nutrition at the University of Maine. And the U.S. imports organic food from many countries—almost 100 in 2021, according to Reana Kovalcik, director of public affairs at the Organic Trade Association.

DOES IT HAVE FEWER PESTICIDES?

Yes. Hence the findings of a small study published in Environmental Research in 2019, which revealed that people who switched from a conventional diet to an organic one had lower levels of pesticide metabolites in their urine. And while what we know about the harm of synthetic pesticides is limited, the Environmental Protection Agency says agricultural pesticide exposure has been associated with asthma, bronchitis, non-Hodgkins lymphoma, Parkinson's disease, and certain

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

A QUICK GUIDE TO SEALS & CLAIMS

While the term "organic" is generally federally regulated, some others aren't—and can be confusing. This can help you decode food labels you see.

USDA Organic Seal

This certification from the Department of Agriculture is rated Excellent overall by CR.

100% Organic

This means all ingredients are certified organic. Products also carry the USDA Organic seal.

Organic

At least 95 percent of ingredients are certified organic. Products also carry the USDA Organic seal.

"Made With" Organic Ingredients

At least 70 percent of ingredients must be certified organic, but products can't carry the USDA Organic seal or use "organic" on their main label panel. Products less than 70 percent organic can note organic items only in ingredients lists, such as "organic carrots."

cancers. In addition, a study published in JAMA Internal Medicine in 2020 reported a higher risk of dying from any cause as well as from cardiovascular disease in people with the highest levels of pyrethroid pesticide metabolites in their urine. Some research also suggests that children with greater exposure to certain pesticides are more likely to be diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and that synthetic pesticides may disrupt our endocrine systems, which are responsible for hormone regulation.

IS ORGANIC BETTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT?

Yes. Synthetic pesticides and fertilizers can damage soil and pollute water. "Many of the pesticides and synthetic forms of fertilizer, if not managed and fine-tuned, often end up in our water and even in our fish," says Garry Stephenson, PhD, a professor in the department of crop and soil science at Oregon State University. Nitrogen-based fertilizer, often used in conventional agriculture, is a major contributor to air and water pollution, according to the Natural Resources Defense Council.

These days, however, some conventional farmers are turning to methods that spare the environment. For instance, some are switching to organic-friendly fertilizer, says Matt Ryan, PhD, an associate professor in the School of Integrative Plant Science at Cornell University.

When it comes to farm animals, organic rules call for them to have year-round outdoor access and be raised on organic land, and for grazing animals like cattle to have access to organic pastures at least 120 days a year. Space to exercise is required, but animals don't have to get a certain amount of space or never be caged, and overall, animal welfare requirements for USDA Organic certification are minimal.

DO THE ANIMALS RECEIVE ANY ANTIBIOTICS?

Generally, no, with the exception of chickens and turkeys still in the egg and on their first day of life. But routine antibiotics are still widely used in conventional beef and poultry, which can lead to antibiotic-resistant infections. "That means infections [in animals and people] that used to be easily cured may have the potential to become serious, even life-threatening," says James E. Rogers, PhD, director of food safety research and testing at CR.

Regenerative Farming 101

A SMALL BUT growing number of farmers are now earning certification (not federally regulated) for what's called regenerative farming. This aims to stop soil erosion, which is due to climate change and practices like growing the same crops repeatedly, rendering farmland unproductive. It's also about clean water, "land access for animals, farmworker justice, and healthy world communities," says Mark Muller, executive director of the Regenerative Agriculture Foundation.

These farmers use a variety of methods, such as improving the soil by having livestock "massage" nutrients into the land with their hooves while grazing. Regenerative Organic Certified products also carry the USDA Organic seal. Those with Regenerative Organic Alliance or Certified Regenerative by A Greener World (AGW) seals may or may not.

Real Organic Project Seal

A nongovernment seal, though only farms that are already USDA certified organic are eligible to pursue it. Foods must be grown in soil, not water, as USDA allows. Animals must graze in pastures.

Natural

Has no meaning for most foods. For meat and poultry, the USDA defines this as minimally processed with no added artificial ingredients.

Pesticide-Free

Not USDA regulated, and doesn't mean a product is organic.

Non-GMO Project Verified

CR rates this seal as Excellent for ensuring very minimal GMO use or none at all. Not USDA regulated, and doesn't mean a food is organic.

Certified Humane Raised and Handled

Certifies livestock were never held in small cages or given hormones. Rated Very Good by CR. But doesn't mean it's organic.

No Antibiotics (or similar)

Alone, this means only that an animal was never given these drugs. Verification requirements are weak unless accompanied by the USDA Organic seal or USDA Processed Verified shield. Rated Poor by CR.

Certified Naturally Grown

Farmers with this peer-reviewed certification commit to many organic practices. About 8 percent of CNG farmers also carry the USDA Organic seal.

REAP THE BENEFITS OF ORGANIC FOR LESS

THERE ARE A slew of ways to save on organics or find nonorganic items with similar health and environmental advantages. A shopping list can keep you from overbuying. To find the best deals, check unit prices, scan circulars, and search for coupons at sites like Coupon Cabin and Passion for Savings, or the websites of organic food manufacturers. Some, like Amy's Kitchen and Stonyfield Farm, offer coupons for joining their newsletter lists. Consider the following, too:

■ Be Picky

"You can make choices on what to buy organic and what to buy that's conventional based on factors like what's available, what's most important to you, and cost," Rogers says. For items like produce, "Know When It's Best to Choose Organic," on the facing page, can help. In addition, "when possible, choose organic for fruits and veggies that you and your family consume on a regular basis, especially if they're higher risk [see facing page]," says Amy Keating, RD, a CR nutritionist. And note: A thick peel may offer more protection against pesticides, but some types can make their way into the flesh of the produce or be taken up by a plant as it grows, says Lili He, PhD, an associate professor in the department of food science at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. (In general, you'll want to wash produce as CR recommends, for 15 to 20 seconds under running water. Peeling may help remove some pesticide residue, but it isn't foolproof.) For fish and shellfish raised in the U.S., organic labels are meaningless because there are no USDA organic standards for seafood. When it comes to packaged goods like cookies and boxed cereals, manufacturers of organic products are prohibited from using synthetic additives like artificial preservatives and colors that you might want to avoid, Keating says.

■ Bag It Yourself

Consider picking up items like organic grains, nuts, seeds, and dried fruit in stores with bulk bins. "Buying bulk can help you save money, because you buy just what you need," Keating says, "and you'll also reduce packaging waste."

■ Check That Freezer Section

Whether organic or conventional, frozen produce is less expensive but just as nutritious as fresh. "Frozen foods are picked fresh, at the peak of their quality, and frozen immediately," Camire says. To freeze fresh organic produce yourself, wash it, let it dry, then pack it in a freezer-safe container.

■ Try Store-Brand Organics

Aldi, Costco, Kroger, Target, and Walmart are just a few of the chains with their own organic lines, which are often cheaper than brand-name products. A recent online search at Target.com found its Good & Gather organic 2% milk for $3.99 for a half-gallon; Horizon Organic, a national brand, was $5.49. CR has found that store and national brands can be comparable in taste and nutrition. "Check the nutrition facts label to see any differences in the amount of sodium, added sugars, and other ingredients," Keating says.

■ Buy Online

Some online stores offer deals on organic foods. Thrive Market (thrivemarket.com; $60 for an annual membership or $12 monthly) has an extensive selection of organic pantry staples that the company says may save you up to 30 percent off grocery store prices. Online subscription services like Misfits Market (misfitsmarket.com) and Imperfect foods (imperfectfoods.com) sell conventional and organic foods that might otherwise be thrown away because of, say, outdated packaging or approaching expiration dates.

■ Take a Look at Local

Some smaller growers who sell at farmers markets and farm stands, and via community supported agriculture (CSAs, where you pay an up-front fee to get a portion of a farmer's harvest each week), may opt not to apply for or maintain organic certification because of the cost and paperwork.

If you find vendors like these, you can ask if they follow organic practices. Prices at farmers markets, CSAs, farm stands, and markets (find them at usdalocalfoodportal.com) are often similar to or cheaper than at grocery stores, depending on where you live and the season. And some accept Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits. Or join a member-run food co-op that focuses on local food. (Find one at grocery.coop/all-coops.)

PHOTOS, THIS SPREAD: GETTY IMAGES

KNOW WHEN IT'S BEST TO CHOOSE ORGANIC

IN CR'S SURVEY, of the 73 percent of Americans who said they had bought organic food, the most common organic purchases among grocery shoppers were produce (62 percent), eggs (37 percent), meat and poultry (35 percent), and dairy (32 percent). In this chart we look at how you may want to prioritize organic purchases.

It's based on advice from CR experts, information from CR's 2020 analysis of USDA data on pesticides in 35 kinds of produce, and recent average national costs of conventional and organic foods.* We defined foods as "high priority" if the organic type offers both personal and public health benefits; "medium" means a product offers one or the other. For CR's analysis of pesticides in produce (see more at **CR.org/pesticides**), we focused mostly on fresh items, and included data on U.S.-grown and imported when possible. And while organic is usually pricier, it can be less expensive in a few cases, and prices vary by area and season.

PRODUCE

PRIORITY: **High**

WHY: To reduce exposure to synthetic pesticides and fertilizers typically used on conventional produce. CR's 2020 analysis rated 16 out of 35 kinds of produce Poor or Fair for pesticides, making these the most important ones to buy organic. See price comparisons at right, aside from cherries, nectarines, peaches, snap peas, and watermelon.

■ ORGANIC PRICE ■ CONVENTIONAL PRICE

Apples, Honeycrisp
PER POUND
$3.75 $2.74

Blueberries
1 PINT
$4.32 $2.72

Celery
BUNCH
$2.00 $1.60

Pears, Bartlett
PER POUND
$1.94 $1.69

Strawberries
PER POUND
$4.35 $3.06

Green Beans**
PER POUND
$2.59 $1.33

Kale
1 BUNCH
$1.85 $0.84

Lettuce, Romaine
1 HEAD
$1.82 $1.49

Potatoes, Russet
3-LB. BAG
$4.64 $1.33

Spinach, baby (fresh)***
5- TO 6-OZ. PACKAGE
$2.90 $2.70

Zucchini
1 LB.
$2.43 $1.41

BEEF/PORK

PRIORITY: **Medium**

Ground beef, 80%-90% lean**
PER POUND $6.99 $3.99

WHY: Organic cows and pigs aren't given antibiotics, and the widespread use of these drugs is causing a rise in antibiotic-resistant bacteria. Also, organic meat with an "American Grassfed" seal (rated Excellent by CR) means the animal was raised in pastures on a diet of grass and forage. Note that with conventional pork, the pigs can be fed animal byproducts, while cows cannot.

POULTRY/EGGS

PRIORITY: **Medium**

Boneless, skinless chicken breast**
PER POUND $7.98 $4.14

WHY: As with beef and pork, to minimize the use of antibiotics and the issue of antibiotic-resistant bacteria. Note that unlike organic poultry, conventional poultry can be given feed that contains mammal or avian byproducts, such as manure.

DAIRY

PRIORITY: **Medium**

Milk
HALF-GALLON $4.45 $2.26

WHY: As with the other proteins here, to cut antibiotic use and the rise of antibiotic-resistant bacteria. Unlike conventional dairy cows, organic cattle can't be given extra hormones, which are themselves associated with an increase in infections that may need to be treated with antibiotics. Organic dairy cows must also have an organic diet with no mammal or avian byproducts.

*Price data as of May 13, 2022, from the USDA's Weekly Advertised Retail Prices reports unless otherwise noted. Specific types within each produce category (like Honeycrisp apples) were chosen to illustrate price differences, not because they had higher pesticide levels than other types.
**Price data is from April 11, 2022.
***Both U.S.-grown conventional and organic spinach were rated Poor, as was imported conventional spinach. Imported fresh organic spinach was rated Excellent. U.S.-grown frozen spinach was rated Poor, but frozen imported was rated Very Good.

OUR TESTS REVEAL

The Best (and Safest) Sunscreens

We tested 52 sprays and lotions to help you get the right sun protection.

by Sally Wadyka // Illustrations by Sam Island

SPRAY

TRADER JOE'S SPRAY SPF 50+ $6

74 OVERALL SCORE

LOTION

EQUATE (Walmart) ULTRA LOTION SPF 50 $5

68 OVERALL SCORE

SPRAY
SUN BUM SPRAY SPF 50 $16
67 OVERALL SCORE
LOTION
LA ROCHE-POSAY ANTHELIOS MELT-IN MILK LOTION SPF 60 $37
73 OVERALL SCORE
SUN BUM
50
LA ROCHE-POSAY
LABORATOIRE DERMATOLOGIQUE
60
Body & Face
BROAD SPECTRUM SPF 60
ANTHELIOS
MELT-IN MILK SUNSCREEN
Fast absorbing, velvety finish
For all skin types
with CELL-OX SHIELD®
UVA/UVB Protection + Antioxidants
Tested on sensitive skin. Fragrance-free
WATER RESISTANT (80 MINUTES)
5.0 FL.OZ. - 150 ml
SPRAY
ALBA BOTANICA HAWAIIAN COCONUT CLEAR SPRAY SPF 50 $9.50
72 OVERALL SCORE
Reef friendly & cruelty free
new look
alba BOTANICA
broad spectrum
50
coconut
clear spray

THERE'S BEEN A LOT OF NEWS RECENTLY RAISING ALARMS ABOUT SUNSCREENS. Last summer, several spray sunscreens were recalled after benzene, a known carcinogen, was detected in them. Other research has shown that some sunscreen ingredients can seep through skin into your bloodstream, and the Food and Drug Administration has asked manufacturers for more data on their safety. And Hawaii has banned certain ingredients because of concerns that they may harm ocean reefs. ***With all that, you may be asking yourself whether sunscreen is still worth it.***

The short answer: Absolutely. While those issues raise real concerns, at this point the risks are more theoretical than proven. Regular sunscreen use, on the other hand, clearly prevents skin cancers and saves lives. Some research suggests it can lower the risk of melanoma, the most serious type of skin cancer, by about 50 percent.

In addition, there are smart choices you can make to ensure that the sunscreens you choose for you and your family are safe and effective, and maybe better for the environment.

To help in that effort, Consumer Reports tested 52 sunscreens, identifying those that work best and those that don't protect you as well. We also tested every spray sunscreen in our ratings for benzene: All were free of the harmful chemical. (See "Is There Benzene in Your Sunscreen?" on the facing page, for more on benzene in aerosol personal care products.) We also delved into the research and talked with experts to understand the potential health and environmental health risks posed by some sunscreen ingredients. Here, answers to those questions.

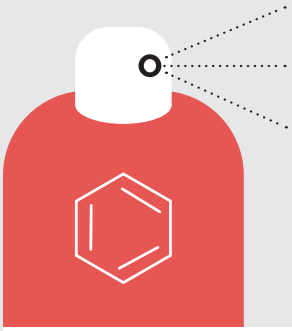
Are Some Sunscreens Safer Than Others?

Recent research has raised some concerns about so-called chemical sunscreens—those that use one or more of a dozen chemical ingredients approved for use in the U.S. to filter the sun's damaging ultraviolet rays.

In 2019, the FDA announced that it wanted more information on the safety of those ingredients, including whether they are absorbed systemically—through the skin into the bloodstream. That's in part because Americans are now using a lot more sunscreen than in the past, and because today's products contain more combinations and higher concentrations of the ingredients.

Soon after, FDA scientists published studies showing that six common chemical ingredients—avobenzone, homosalate, octinoxate, octisalate, octocrylene, and oxybenzone—do indeed get into the bloodstream.

The FDA stresses that absorption doesn't mean these ingredients are unsafe. But the amounts absorbed were higher than the level the FDA



Is There Benzene in Your Sunscreen?

Millions of products have been recalled in the past year because of concerns about this known carcinogen. Here's what you need to know.

LAST SPRING, a small Connecticut lab called Valisure announced it had found benzene, a known carcinogen, in Neutrogena spray sunscreens. The findings prompted Johnson & Johnson, which makes the sunscreen, to recall affected products. And the Food and Drug Administration told manufacturers of other aerosol personal care products to test for the chemical, too.

Many found it. To date, at least 15 brands have been affected, with more than 25 million products recalled because of contamination with the chemical. That includes other aerosol sunscreens, such as some from Aveeno and Coppertone; deodorants from Old Spice and Secret; and spray conditioners and shampoos from Aussie and Pantene.

The recalls also prompted Consumer Reports to look for benzene in every aerosol sunscreen in our ratings, as well as several top-rated spray insect repellents. In addition, CR tested current versions of some other sunscreens that had been previously recalled, including from Johnson & Johnson, as well as one from Coppertone, for the chemical. All of the sunscreens and insect repellents that CR tested came back negative for benzene.

But other products continue to be recalled for it. Most recently, two types of Suave aerosol antiperspirants, made by Unilever, were recalled in March after they were found to contain benzene.

What's going on, and how concerned should you be?

Long-Term Risks

Since Valisure found benzene in sunscreens, the FDA has been trying to figure out why the chemical is showing up in so many products. So far, the agency has no clear answers, because benzene is not an ingredient in the products.

"This contamination may be related to inactive ingredients such as carbomers (thickening agents), isobutane (a spray propellant), or other drug components made from hydrocarbons," the FDA said in December.

What is clear is that while the amounts of benzene found in the products aren't high enough to pose immediate health threats, they do raise safety concerns. That's especially true when people are exposed to benzene for long periods or from other sources.

The FDA says benzene levels in consumer products should be less than 2 parts per million (ppm). Frequent exposure to amounts above that could increase the risk of leukemia.

Some of the recalled products had benzene levels well above that amount. For example, the recalled Aveeno and Neutrogena sunscreens had benzene levels ranging from 11.2 to 23.6 ppm, five to 12 times above the level advised by the FDA.

Even at those levels, benzene is unlikely to cause immediate, serious health problems, says David Eastmond, a toxicologist and professor emeritus at the University of California, Riverside, who has extensively studied benzene.

But he and other health experts worry about the risk posed by repeated exposure, especially because people are also exposed to benzene from other sources, notably cigarette smoke and fumes at the gas pump. And it is the combined exposure from multiple sources that poses the biggest health risks, he says. For those reasons, he underscores the importance of avoiding it when you can.

What You Should Do

Concerns about benzene possibly being in some products should not be a reason to avoid using sunscreen. The products are essential to protecting against skin cancer and other skin damage. Instead, use CR's ratings to find an effective one.

And be reassured that benzene was not detected in any of the aerosols we tested, including Trader Joe's Spray SPF 50+, the highest-rated product in our ratings. Or choose a highly rated sunscreen lotion or cream, because benzene has not been linked to those kinds of products.

To see whether you have a recalled sunscreen spray or other aerosol personal care product in your home, go to **CR.org/benzene.** If you have one, throw it away.

—Ryan Felton

says would exempt them from safety testing, so more research is needed.

Kathleen Suozzi, MD, assistant professor of dermatology at the Yale School of Medicine, says, "The key question is whether that systemic absorption actually causes harm."

Definitive answers may be years away. "Generating the type of information the FDA desires is tough, time-consuming, and very expensive," says Mark Chandler, president of ACT Solutions, which consults with sunscreen and other cosmetic manufacturers on product formulation.

So Should I Stop Using Chemical Sunscreens?

The FDA, the American Academy of Dermatology, and independent researchers say there is no need for people to do that now.

"These UV filters have been used for years by millions of people, and there have not been noticeable systemic effects," says Henry W. Lim, MD, a leading sunscreen researcher and former chair of the department of dermatology at Henry Ford Health in Michigan, who has also consulted with sunscreen makers. "I still feel very comfortable saying these are a safe way to prevent skin cancer and other damage from the sun."

That said, some of those chemicals may be more worrisome than others. "Oxybenzone and, to a lesser extent, octinoxate have emerged as the biggest concerns," Lim says.

That's primarily because preliminary research in animals suggests oxybenzone might interfere with hormone production, which theoretically could affect fertility, puberty, and thyroid function. However, sunscreen research that has been done in humans hasn't raised any major concerns. For example, while a 2020 review of 29 studies that looked at the health effects of oxybenzone and octinoxate said more research was needed, it also did not identify clear links to any health problems.

Still, to play it safe, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that parents not use oxybenzone-containing sunscreens on children. And people of any age who want to avoid sunscreens with either of those chemicals can easily do so, because manufacturers are now using them less often. In fact, of the 52 sunscreens in our ratings, only three contain oxybenzone and none have octinoxate.

For the Best Protection

APPLY INDOORS
Put sunscreen on 15 to 30 minutes before heading out to give it a chance to start working before UV rays hit you.

USE ENOUGH LOTION
In a bathing suit, use a shot-glass-sized amount of sunscreen to cover your whole body. If you're mostly clothed, use a teaspoon on each arm, leg, or other exposed body part.

SPRAY SAFELY
Spray into your hand and rub into your body. Or hold the nozzle an inch from your skin and spray until your skin glistens, then rub in.

DON'T FORGET THESE SPOTS
Ears, upper back, backs of hands and knees, and tops of feet. And swipe on a lip balm with SPF.

REAPPLY
Put on more every 2 hours you're outside and right after swimming or sweating.

Why Not Opt for a Mineral Sunscreen Instead?

It's true that sunscreens with the minerals titanium dioxide and zinc oxide—which work by creating a physical barrier on your skin—aren't absorbed into the skin and don't make their way into the bloodstream.

Unfortunately, those mineral sunscreens may not be as effective compared with the most efficient chemical filters, according to Chandler, at the sunscreen formulation company. All of the mineral sunscreens CR has ever tested appear near the middle or bottom of our ratings.

One possible reason: It takes a lot of titanium or zinc to create a product with a high SPF, Chandler says, and it's difficult to do that without making the sunscreen thick, gloppy, and hard to rub in. In addition, the minerals sometimes clump up in the product, so they don't get evenly dispersed on skin, leaving potential gaps in protection. "They also can wipe off more easily than chemical sunscreens, making frequent reapplication even more important," says Suozzi, at Yale.

How to Read That Label

MINERAL

These sunscreens have titanium dioxide, zinc oxide, or both. They sit on the skin's surface, and unlike chemical active ingredients, aren't absorbed into blood, though they also tend to be less effective.

REEF SAFE

You often see this on mineral sunscreens or those without oxybenzone. But there's no standardized meaning behind this or similar claims.

FOR BABIES

The FDA doesn't make a distinction between sunscreens for babies or children and those for adults. They all contain the same active ingredients and must meet the same criteria for safety and effectiveness.

DERMATOLOGIST TESTED

This isn't a regulated term, so you don't know what the product was tested for or how extensive the testing was.

SPF 100

You might think SPF 100 provides twice as much protection as an SPF 50, but that's not the case. SPF 100 blocks 99 percent of the sun's burning UVB rays. SPF 50 blocks 98 percent of UVB rays, and SPF 30 blocks 97 percent.

BROAD SPECTRUM

This means the sunscreen protects against UVA rays, which are responsible for skin cancer and aging skin, as well as UVB rays, which are mostly responsible for sunburn and contribute to skin cancer.

WATER RESISTANT

The sunscreen will remain effective for the time stated—either 40 or 80 minutes—when you're swimming or sweating. But you still need to reapply once you get out of the water.

NO OXYBENZONE

This chemical UV filter is often flagged as being potentially harmful to ocean life. Many sunscreens have been reformulated to remove it.

If you prefer mineral sunscreens, we suggest California Kids #supersensitive Tinted Lotion SPF 30+ or Badger Active Mineral Cream SPF 30 Unscented. They were the highest-scoring mineral sunscreens we tested, though both still rank well below the top-performing chemical sunscreens.

Are 'Reef Safe' Products Better for the Environment?

Some research suggests that oxybenzone and octinoxate may threaten coral in ocean reefs and harm other marine life. So far, that connection has primarily been studied at very high doses and in the lab, not in the real world. And in research looking at sunscreen chemicals in ocean water, the amounts detected, even at popular beaches, are far below the levels linked to damage in lab studies.

Still, the potential concern has prompted Hawaii, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and some other locations to ban sunscreens with either ingredient. And some sunscreen manufacturers now label their products as "reef safe." In most cases, the term is used when a product doesn't have either oxybenzone or octinoxate. But the FDA does not regulate the term, so it has no defined meaning.

So if you want a product without oxybenzone or octinoxate, your best bet is to check the ingredients list.

Does a Spray or Lotion Work Better?

Used correctly, both can do a good job. In fact, the highest-rated product in our rating is a spray, Trader Joe's Spray SPF 50+.

But sprays can be tricky to apply. "The droplets can disperse into the air, making it easy to miss areas on your skin," Lim says. To avoid that, spray sunscreen onto the palm of your hand and then rub it in. Next best is to hold the nozzle just an inch from your skin, spray until you can see a film on your skin, and then rub it in.

Also take care to make sure you don't inhale the spray, because the ingredients may irritate or even harm your lungs. (For that reason, CR's experts say it's best not to use sprays on kids.) Spraying it into your hand also helps prevent inhalation. Never spray directly into your face, and be careful using sprays when it's windy. The spray can blow into your face and mouth, or disperse and not adequately cover your skin.

Can I Skip Sunscreen If I Cover Up?

Not entirely. You still need it on exposed skin. Experts point to enormous amounts of research linking sun exposure to about 90 percent of skin cancers, and the proven effectiveness of sunscreens in blocking cancer-causing UV rays.

"The adverse effects of sun exposure are well-established," says Lim. "There is strong evidence that sunscreens help prevent skin cancer."

However, covering up means you can use far less sunscreen. For example, if you wear a long-sleeved swim shirt or rash guard instead of a traditional bathing suit, you won't need to apply sunscreen to your arms, back, and chest. That can reduce the amount of sunscreen you need to use on your body (and that may get into your skin or into the ocean).

Dermatologists say that sunscreen should never be your only defense against UV rays. Try to avoid the sun at its strongest, between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. And when you are outside, especially during those hours, cover up, wear a broad-brimmed hat, and seek shade when possible.

Are Safer, More Effective Sunscreens Coming?

Concerns about sunscreen ingredients being absorbed through skin into the bloodstream have prompted some researchers to look for alternatives, says Christopher Bunick, MD, associate professor of dermatology at the Yale School of Medicine.

Researchers there, for example, are exploring formulas that encapsulate chemical sunscreen ingredients, which would keep them on top of the skin and provide protection without being absorbed.

Innovations are coming for mineral sunscreens, too. "We're working with spherical silica particles and combining them with zinc oxide," says Chandler. "The UV light goes into the spheres and gets bounced around and deflected. Not only does it make the product go on more smoothly, but in some formulas we're able to double the SPF without adding more zinc."

It's also possible that some of the sunscreen ingredients used in Europe and Canada will be approved for use here. "Some of those are more effective UVA filters than we currently have, and they should have less penetration into the skin," Lim says. A few are currently stuck in the FDA approval process. "So this is a glimmer of hope that we might eventually see [them] used in sunscreens in the U.S.," Lim says.

Ratings › **Don't Get Burned** All of the sunscreens listed below have a stated SPF of at least 30, the minimum recommended by experts. All have a water-resistance claim of 80 minutes, unless otherwise noted.

	Brand + Product	Overall Score	Pricing			Test Results		
			Price	Cost per oz.	Package size (oz.)	UVA	UVB (SPF)	Variation from SPF
Lotions With Chemical Active Ingredients	✓ **La Roche-Posay** Anthelios Melt-In Milk Lotion SPF 60	73	$37.00	$7.40	5.0	⏫	↑	↓
	$ **Equate (Walmart)** Ultra Lotion SPF 50	68	$5.00	$0.63	8.0	⏫	↑	!
	Kiehl's Activated Sun Protector Lotion SPF 30 [1]	65	$32.00	$6.40	5.0	⏫	!	!
	Equate (Walmart) Sport Lotion SPF 50	61	$4.00	$0.50	8.0	↑	!	↓
	Solimo (Amazon) Sport Lotion SPF 50	57	$6.30	$0.79	8.0	↑	!	↓
	Banana Boat Sport Ultra Lotion SPF 50+	57	$10.00	$1.25	8.0	⏫	↓	⏬
	Up & Up (Target) Sport Lotion SPF 50	56	$5.20	$0.50	10.4	↑	!	↓
	Black Girl Sunscreen Ultra Sheer Lotion SPF 30 Fragrance Free	55	$19.00	$6.33	3.0	⏫	↓	↓
	Neutrogena Invisible Daily Defense Lotion SPF 60+	55	$17.50	$5.83	3.0	↑	!	⏬
	Hawaiian Tropic Silk Hydration Weightless Face Lotion SPF 30	51	$9.00	$5.29	1.7	⏫	↓	↓
	Hawaiian Tropic Sheer Touch Ultra Radiance Lotion SPF 50	47	$10.00	$1.25	8.0	⏫	↓	⏬
	Panama Jack Lotion SPF 50	45	$13.00	$2.17	6.0	⏫	↓	⏬
	Alba Botanica Sport Lotion SPF 45 Fragrance Free	43	$8.00	$2.00	4.0	⏫	↓	⏬
	Banana Boat Light as Air Face Lotion SPF 50+	43	$13.00	$4.33	3.0	⏫	↓	⏬
	Australian Gold Plant Based Face Lotion SPF 50 Aloe & Coconut	42	$12.00	$4.00	3.0	⏫	↓	⏬
	Sun Bum Lotion SPF 30	42	$16.00	$2.00	8.0	⏫	⏬	⏬
	La Roche-Posay Anthelios Clear Skin Face Lotion SPF 60	36	$20.00	$11.76	1.7	!	↓	⏬
	Walgreens Sport Lotion SPF 50 Fresh Scent	36	$3.00	$1.00	3.0	↑	↓	⏬
	Hawaiian Tropic Matte Effect Lotion SPF 50+	35	$9.00	$1.50	6.0	↓	!	⏬
	Black Girl Sunscreen Kids Lotion SPF 50	18	$10.00	$3.33	3.0	⏬	↓	⏬
Sprays With Chemical Active Ingredients	$ **Trader Joe's** Spray SPF 50+	74	$6.00	$1.00	6.0	⏫	↑	!
	✓ **Alba Botanica** Hawaiian Coconut Clear Spray SPF 50	72	$9.50	$1.58	6.0	↑	↑	!
	✓ **Sun Bum** Spray SPF 50	67	$16.00	$2.67	6.0	↑	↑	!
	Australian Gold Ultimate Hydration Continuous Spray SPF 30	66	$12.00	$2.00	6.0	⏫	!	↑
	Equate (Walmart) Sport Spray SPF 50	65	$4.00	$0.73	5.5	↑	↑	!
	La Roche-Posay Anthelios Lotion Spray SPF 60 [1]	65	$37.00	$7.40	5.0	⏫	!	⏬
	Up & Up (Target) Sport Spray SPF 50	64	$4.00	$0.73	5.5	↑	!	↓
	Banana Boat Sport Ultra Spray SPF 100 [1]	63	$11.50	$1.92	6.0	↑	↑	⏬

POOR ⏬ ↓ ! ↑ ⏫ EXCELLENT | ✓ RECOMMENDED | $ CR BEST BUY

[1] Contains oxybenzone.

	Brand + Product	Overall Score	Pricing			Test Results		
			Price	Cost per oz.	Package size (oz.)	UVA	UVB (SPF)	Variation from SPF
continued Sprays With Chemical Active Ingredients	**Banana Boat** Sport Performance Cool Zone Spray SPF 30	53	$12.00	$2.00	6.0	⏫	🔽	🔽
	Hawaiian Tropic AntiOxidant+ Mist SPF 30	51	$9.00	$2.65	3.4	⏫	🔽	⏬
	Coola Classic Spray SPF 70 Peach Blossom	51	$25.00	$4.17	6.0	⏫	🔽	⏬
	Panama Jack Sport Spray SPF 30	47	$14.00	$2.55	5.5	⏫	🔽	⏬
	Hawaiian Tropic Silk Hydration Weightless Spray SPF 30	42	$9.00	$1.50	6.0	⏫	⏬	⏬
	Supergoop Play Antioxidant Mist SPF 50	30	$21.00	$3.50	6.0	🔼	⏬	⏬
Lotions and Sprays With Mineral Active Ingredients	**California Kids** #supersensitive Tinted Lotion SPF 30+	55	$24.00	$8.28	2.9	🔽	🔼	⏫
	Badger Active Mineral Cream SPF 30 Unscented [2]	55	$18.00	$6.21	2.9	⏫	🔽	🔽
	Alba Botanica Sport Mineral Lotion SPF 45 Fragrance Free	53	$14.00	$3.50	4.0	🔽	🔼	🔼
	Aveeno Positively Mineral Sensitive Skin Lotion SPF 50	50	$8.00	$2.67	3.0	🔼	🔽	⏬
	Neutrogena Pure & Free Baby Lotion SPF 50	46	$13.00	$4.33	3.0	⏫	🔽	⏬
	Badger Kids Mineral Cream SPF 40 Tangerine & Vanilla	45	$18.00	$6.21	2.9	⏫	🔽	⏬
	Aveeno Positively Mineral Sensitive Skin Face Lotion SPF 50	44	$10.00	$5.00	2.0	🔼	🔽	⏬
	Neutrogena Sheer Zinc Mineral Lotion SPF 50	36	$13.00	$4.33	3.0	🔼	🔽	⏬
	Hello Bello Mineral Lotion SPF 50+	36	$14.00	$2.33	6.0	🔼	🔽	⏬
	Goddess Garden Organics Daily Mineral Lotion SPF 30	36	$20.00	$3.33	6.0	⏫	⏬	⏬
	Banana Boat Baby Mineral Lotion SPF 50	31	$9.00	$1.50	6.0	❗	🔽	⏬
	Alba Botanica Kids Mineral Lotion SPF 30 Fragrance Free	31	$11.00	$2.75	4.0	❗	⏬	⏬
	Coola Mineral Spray SPF 30 Fragrance-Free	31	$28.00	$3.50	8.0	🔼	⏬	⏬
	Blue Lizard Sensitive Mineral Lotion SPF 50+	29	$20.00	$4.00	5.0	🔽	🔽	⏬
	Coppertone Pure & Simple Mineral Lotion SPF 50	28	$10.00	$1.67	6.0	🔼	⏬	⏬
	Banana Boat Kids Sport Lotion SPF 50+	27	$10.00	$1.67	6.0	❗	⏬	⏬
	MDSolarSciences Mineral Moisture Defense Lotion SPF 50	25	$39.00	$9.75	4.0	❗	⏬	⏬
	Australian Gold Botanical Mineral Lotion SPF 30	18	$17.00	$3.40	5.0	🔽	⏬	⏬

HOW WE TEST: CR uses methods patterned after, but not identical to, those required by the Food and Drug Administration for sunscreen manufacturers. We test each product to determine the SPF it provides (a measure of how well it filters UVB rays) by applying it to volunteers' skin, having them soak in a tub of water, and exposing them to different intensities of simulated sunlight. About a day later, a trained technician analyzes the exposed areas for redness. We test a product's protection against UVA rays (to provide "broad spectrum" coverage) by applying it to plastic plates, shining UV light on them, and measuring how much **UVA** and **UVB** rays they absorb.

Variation from SPF score indicates how closely a product's tested SPF matched the SPF on the label.
- ⏫ Tested 85% or above labeled SPF.
- 🔼 Tested 70%-84% labeled SPF.
- ❗ Tested 60%-69% labeled SPF.
- 🔽 Tested 50%-59% labeled SPF.
- ⏬ Tested 49% or below labeled SPF.

[2] Water resistant for 40 minutes.

ROAD REPORT

NEWS & EXPERT ADVICE TO KEEP YOU AHEAD OF THE CURVE™

FIRST DRIVE

Kia Sportage

The redesigned 2023 Kia Sportage, cousin to the Hyundai Tucson, offers gas-only, hybrid, and plug-in hybrid versions, along with three adventure-themed trims. It has many key safety features, and offers a few showoff items.

CR'S TAKE: The Sportage we bought makes a strong first impression, with its fancy screens and trim details. It's roomy—front and rear. Ride and handling are competent, but the power from the base engine doesn't stand out.

BASE PRICE RANGE $25,990-$36,790
DESTINATION CHARGE $1,255
PRICE AS DRIVEN $31,220

ASK OUR EXPERTS

Do I need to remove personal data from my infotainment system when I trade in my car?

Yes. To safeguard your privacy and security, clear your personal data from your car before selling it. Start by reverting the infotainment system to factory settings (the owner's manual explains how). A factory reset will clear addresses from the navigation system, delete phone contacts, and unpair your devices. Also log out of your mobile car apps and clear all garage door codes. Remove personal paperwork from the car's storage compartments and cancel any subscriptions.

TIP FROM THE TEST TRACK

Can I use my electric vehicle to jump-start a gas-powered car?

It's not a good idea. Electric vehicles have two batteries: the big one that provides propulsion and a smaller 12-volt battery (like those in conventional cars) that powers various onboard systems. Only the smaller battery could theoretically be used to jump-start a gas-powered car, but the process might be different from what you're used to and the EV's 12-volt battery might not supply enough power anyway. Plus, there is a risk that you could damage your car or the other person's. So if somebody asks you for a jump, politely decline.

THE VITAL STATISTIC

5%

The amount your car insurance may increase this year, in part because of inflation. Prices for new and used vehicles have risen, and more people are likely to be driving as COVID-19 abates. The premium increase means the typical driver will spend $1,707 on insurance in 2022 vs. $1,633 in 2021. To save on car insurance, go to CR.org/waystosave.

Source: Insurify's 2021 Insuring the American Driver report and analysis.

RECALL

Ford

Ford Motor Company is recalling over 345,000 Escape SUVs from the 2020 to 2022 model years and Bronco Sport SUVs from the 2021 and 2022 model years to fix an oil leak that might cause a fire.

WHAT TO DO: Dealerships will inspect the oil separator and will replace it, if necessary, at no charge. For more information, contact Ford at 866-436-7332.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY KIERSTEN ESSENPREIS

How to Get Ready for a Road Trip

After two years of hunkering down, Americans are headed out on the open road. An overwhelming majority (90 percent) have travel plans for this summer, says research firm Destination Analysts. Many are also going to drive, despite high gas prices. If you're looking forward to a road trip, we've got tips to help you save money, stay safe, and manage unexpected hurdles.

by Keith Barry

1. BEFORE YOU GO

MAKE SURE YOUR VEHICLE is ready for a road trip. Start with the tires, including the spare, if your car has one: Check the pressure and inspect the tread, looking for visible signs of damage and wear. Top off the windshield wiper fluid and replace your wiper blades if they're at least 6 months old. For other checks, consider going to a shop you trust, especially if your car hasn't been serviced in more than a year, says John Ibbotson, CR's chief mechanic. Have technicians inspect accessory belts and hoses—they can have life spans as short as five years or 50,000 miles—and ask them to check oil, coolant, and power steering and brake fluid for proper levels and potential contamination.

Road-Trip To-Do's

■ CAR EMERGENCY KIT

Take jumper cables, a flashlight, duct tape, basic tools, and a tire gauge. A portable jump-starter can juice up your phone and car.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY SEAN McCABE

PACKING

If your car has cargo tie-down anchors, use them to secure heavy items. Don't let luggage block the driver's view.

ROOF AND BIKE RACKS

After installing, double-check your work by driving for a few minutes (with the rack empty). Pull over and make sure the rack is still well-secured.

INTERNET

If your car has a built-in WiFi hot spot, consider enabling it for a month so that all passengers can use their devices.

PETS

For your safety and theirs, pets should be in a crate or a secured seat harness with padded straps. If needed, you can find accredited animal hospitals en route at aaha.org.

FIRST-AID AND OTHER SUPPLIES

Pack bandages, something that can be used as a tourniquet, and pain relievers—plus N95 masks, rapid COVID-19 antigen tests, and hand sanitizer.

TOLLS

Some states no longer accept cash. Plan your route and sign up for the toll transponder (or transponders) you'll need, such as E-ZPass. The tolls might be discounted, and it's easier than paying toll bills later by mail.

CAR SEATS

Almost half of all child car seats are improperly installed. Go to cert.safekids.org to find out more about safe installation.

2. ON THE ROAD

DON'T WASTE TIME and money on things that aren't fun—such as overspending on gas or dealing with a flat tire, a breakdown, or worse. These tips can save you money and headaches.

Sign Up for a Roadside Assistance Plan

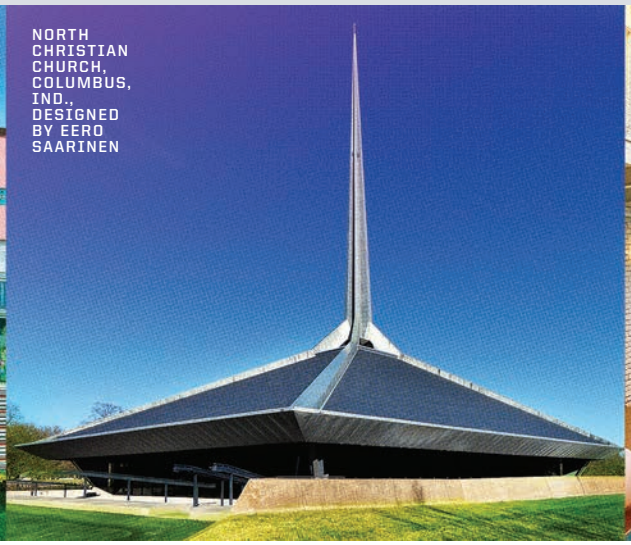
These connect you with service providers so you don't find yourself stuck if you need a jump start, tow, or tire change. Buying roadside assistance may also save you money: Paying out of pocket for long-haul towing can run in the hundreds of dollars, and roadside assistance plans can cost around $35 to $120 per year. Sign up before your trip because your membership might not go into effect immediately.

AAA offers the most well-known roadside assistance service, but AARP and many car insurance companies also have it. Some mobile phone providers, such as Verizon, offer the service for a monthly fee. Don't pay twice for the same benefit: Some newer cars come with it free for a number of years after purchase or lease. A few credit cards throw it in as a perk, too.

Practice Fuel Efficiency

Reducing aerodynamic drag is one way to do this: Remove the roof rack if

TILT'N DINER, TILTON, N.H.


NORTH CHRISTIAN CHURCH, COLUMBUS, IND., DESIGNED BY EERO SAARINEN

BLUEBIRD SPA CITY MOTOR LODGE, SARATOGA SPRINGS, N.Y.

Make the Most of Your Trip

We have some fresh ideas for you, from how to find cool motels off the beaten path to how to create the ultimate road-trip music playlist.

EAT LIKE A LOCAL

Once at your destination, search online for restaurant reviews. You can also go to specialty websites, such as Eater, where locals discuss favorite food spots. It's a good idea to ask a shop owner or staffers at your hotel for lunch or dinner recommendations. This way, you'll find hidden gems that aren't in the guidebooks—such as unassuming roadside diners, food trucks, and barbecue joints you might otherwise pass by.

HEAD FOR HISTORY

The National Register of Historic Places (nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister) and other websites list culturally significant places. See modern architectural gems from the likes of Eero Saarinen in Columbus, Ind. Dine at the Historic Magnolia House in Greensboro, N.C., one of the few places between Atlanta and Richmond that allowed Black guests during the Jim Crow era. Drive, bike, or hike stretches of Oregon's scenic Columbia River Highway.

BE SMART ABOUT POINTS

Many travel rewards programs extended their expiration dates during the first months and years of the pandemic. Some of those extensions have ended, so check the expiration dates on your various credit card, hotel, and other travel points programs to see your account status. You might be surprised to find points you'd forgotten about—maybe you have enough to swing a free hotel night or an upgrade.

PHOTOS, PREVIOUS SPREAD: TOYOTA; ISTOCK

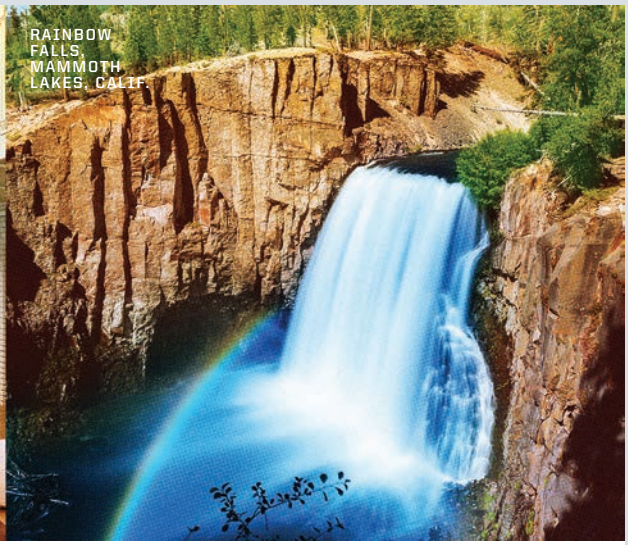
you're not using it; even an empty roof rack can reduce fuel economy by 11 percent for a sedan and 5 percent for a small SUV. Bike racks add drag, too, so take them off when they're not in use. Sticking to the speed limit can also save fuel: Our tests show that cruising at 75 mph instead of 65 mph can cost up to 6 mpg. And pack light, so your car isn't heavier—and therefore less fuel-efficient—than it needs to be.

Have a COVID-19 Plan

The pandemic still poses an unpredictable threat. So before you leave, make sure everyone in your traveling party tests negative and is up to date on vaccinations, including boosters, says Lin H. Chen, MD, immediate past president of the International Society of Travel Medicine and director of the Mount Auburn Hospital Travel Medicine Center in Cambridge, Mass. Be sure to pack rapid antigen tests, N95 masks, and hand sanitizer, she says. "These are tools that can help travelers mitigate their exposure in risky situations, assess themselves if they have suspected COVID-19 symptoms or exposure, and limit spread to others."

If you or someone in your party gets sick while on the road, Chen says the best thing to do is "drive home, if at all possible," where it's easier to isolate and more comfortable than a hotel. Too far from home? Remain masked in a hotel and have food delivered.

You can also get tested and possibly access free treatment at locations across the U.S. Go to aspr.hhs.gov/testtotreat to find out more. Through this program, those who test positive can qualify for a prescription from a healthcare provider and get it filled on-site.



RAINBOW FALLS, MAMMOTH LAKES, CALIF.

PHOTOS, THIS SPREAD, LEFT TO RIGHT: ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; GETTY IMAGES; BLUEBIRD BY LARK; ERNEST KUNG/GETTY IMAGES

BOOK A ROOM WITH A VIBE

Tired of cookie-cutter chain hotels? Many old-fashioned motor court motels are being lovingly rehabbed to transport you straight back to the '50s. Blending retro charm with modern amenities—think redone rooms with walk-in showers mixed with midcentury styling—many have pools, firepits, and even spas. You can find photos and info at HipLodge (hiplodge.com).

CREATE A ROAD-TRIP SOUNDTRACK

Want to know which songs will be on repeat when you get to your destination? Apple Music City Charts can tell you the most-listened-to songs in over 100 places across the country. And some tourism boards have curated playlists designed to capture the feel of a place. There are playlists for Nashville, Tenn., and New Orleans, of course—but did you know you can download songs that capture the essence of New York's Finger Lakes?

SEE SOME NEW SIGHTS

Big crowds are expected at national parks and other popular spots this summer, but you can often find breath-taking alternatives nearby. For example, if you can't get a peak-hours reservation for California's Yosemite National Park, you can search by state at the National Park Service website (nps.gov) and find another option about 90 minutes away: Devils Postpile National Monument and its 101-foot Rainbow Falls.

WAYS TO FILL UP FOR LESS

› Use a **credit card** with strong cash-back benefits for gas. The best ones currently offer up to 5 percent—beating many gas-station-branded cards—and can save $3 to $4 on a 15-gallon fill-up.

› Gas is often cheaper at **Costco, if you're a member,** and the gas meets the Top Tier quality standard. Plus you can save even more if you pay with the Costco Visa cash-back card. Find low-cost gas with the **Google Maps** or **Waze** app, or check the **GasBuddy** website. Be sure to read privacy and terms-of-use disclosures before using apps to ensure you're comfortable with the type of information they collect.

› Retailer rewards programs, such as **Walmart+** and **Kroger Fuel Points,** and apps like **Upside,** can give you cash or points on gas purchases. Again, read any terms and conditions.

3. KINGS OF THE ROAD

AT CR, WE THINK the best cars for road trips are the same ones that are great for everyday driving. They have lots of usable cargo space, a comfortable ride, and key safety technology, and they get great gas mileage. Lately, many vehicles that meet these criteria are hybrids. Today's versions are bigger and more practical for more uses, while still offering significant fuel savings over their gas-only counterparts. Many also offer active driver assistance technology that can make driving less stressful. The Lexus RX450h and Toyota Highlander Hybrid and Sienna can even tow up to 3,500 pounds when properly equipped—enough to haul a small camper.

ROOM FOR ONE (OR TWO)

Honda Accord Hybrid

87 OVERALL SCORE

PREDICTED RELIABILITY

PREDICTED OWNER SATISFACTION

$27,720-$37,590
PRICE RANGE

52 Hwy/40 City/47 Overall
FUEL ECONOMY

The Accord is our current top-rated midsized sedan, and it's easy to see why: It has a comfortable, well-laid-out interior, a roomy trunk, and a quiet cabin—all ideal attributes for a long drive. Opting for the hybrid powertrain doesn't sacrifice acceleration or sportiness over the gas-only version. Adaptive cruise control comes standard, although buyers will have to spring for the pricier EX-L or Touring trim to get blind spot warning (BSW).

Tesla Model 3

79 OVERALL SCORE

PREDICTED RELIABILITY

PREDICTED OWNER SATISFACTION

$46,990-$62,990
PRICE RANGE

358 Miles
RANGE

The only electric vehicle on our list is the Model 3—largely thanks to its available 358-mile range and Tesla's extensive Supercharger network. "Superchargers offer a seamless fast-charging experience from coast to coast," says Jake Fisher, CR's senior director of auto testing. Drivers of other EVs may find the charging process less predictable, he says, because public fast chargers might be from different networks, less centrally located, and not always in good working order.

PHOTOS, LEFT TO RIGHT: HONDA; JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS; HYUNDAI; LEXUS; TOYOTA

THREE'S COMFORTABLE

Hyundai Tucson Hybrid

93 OVERALL SCORE

PREDICTED RELIABILITY

PREDICTED OWNER SATISFACTION

$29,750-$43,200
PRICE RANGE

40 Hwy/29 City/35 Overall
FUEL ECONOMY

We like the five-passenger Tucson Hybrid SUV better than the gas-only Tucson, and not just because of the fuel savings. It's quicker and quieter than the standard model. The front seats are supportive on long drives, there's a generous rear seat and cargo area, the interior has an upscale feel for the price, and the ride is comfortable and composed. BSW and other advanced safety features come standard. All good stuff for a long road trip.

Lexus RX450h

83 OVERALL SCORE

PREDICTED RELIABILITY

PREDICTED OWNER SATISFACTION

$48,270-$56,040
PRICE RANGE

33 Hwy/24 City/29 Overall
FUEL ECONOMY

Plush and well-finished, the RX is a pleasant place to spend a few hours (or more) on the road. The focus is more on quiet and comfort than on road feel and nimble handling. Still, the RX proved secure through the avoidance maneuver test at our track, which should give you confidence if you suddenly need to swerve around an obstacle. A recently redesigned infotainment system is much easier to use.

FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

Toyota Highlander Hybrid

87 OVERALL SCORE

PREDICTED RELIABILITY

PREDICTED OWNER SATISFACTION

$39,555-$51,460
PRICE RANGE

41 Hwy/27 City/35 Overall
FUEL ECONOMY

There's a reason the Highlander Hybrid gets such high owner satisfaction scores year after year. Easy-to-use controls, Android Auto and Apple CarPlay compatibility, and the option to add a WiFi hot spot make it a great road-trip companion, as do active safety features, such as BSW, that come standard on all Highlander Hybrids. A tiny third row is good for smaller passengers, but it's most useful folded down, adding extra space for cargo.

Toyota Sienna

79 OVERALL SCORE

PREDICTED RELIABILITY

PREDICTED OWNER SATISFACTION

$35,285-$51,485
PRICE RANGE

43 Hwy/28 City/36 Overall
FUEL ECONOMY

The Sienna has optional all-wheel drive, comfortable seating for up to eight, a massive cargo area, and better fuel economy than many sedans. It doesn't drive like a small vehicle—handling is uninspiring, and stopping distances are long—but if you need the space, the Sienna's a great choice for a road trip. Seven USB ports and plenty of active safety features come standard, as does a total cruising range of 650 miles. Your passengers are likely to need a stop long before the car does.

WORSE — BETTER

Don't Overpay for Auto Insurance

ALWAYS REVIEW YOUR auto insurance at policy renewal time to be sure that you have the right coverage at the best price. Basic insurance policy coverage includes:

- **Liability:** Required by law in most states, it covers damage to someone else's car and related medical expenses.
- **Collision:** Usually optional (though it could be required by a lender or if you lease the car), this pays for collision-related repairs to your own vehicle.
- **Comprehensive:** This is optional and protects against damage to your car not caused by a collision (such as if a tree limb falls on it). It can provide valuable additional protection for owners of newer cars, which would be very expensive to repair or replace.

Below are explanations of other coverage you may be offered, with expert advice to help you decide which is worthwhile.

GLASS REPLACEMENT

Coverage for a windshield or windows damaged in a crash is usually included in collision policies. Comprehensive policies will often pay to repair or replace glass due to noncollision incidents, such as storms, attempted theft, or a pebble from the roadway striking the windshield. Without that coverage, those types of repairs, which can be costly, are not covered. If your car is equipped with Advanced Driver Assistance Systems (ADAS), make sure your auto glass policy will pay for the required sensor calibration, which makes the cost much higher than a conventional windshield replacement.

GAP INSURANCE

This is coverage you may want to skip. It's designed to protect people who owe more on their loan than the car is worth, in case it's totaled and collision insurance won't cover the full value of the loan. But Douglas Heller, director of insurance for the Consumer Federation of America, says that most people never use this coverage and that it's more of a moneymaker for insurance companies. "The people at most risk of having their outstanding loan exceed the value of their car are people who cannot get loans at reasonable rates," he says. "It is another way that the financial services sector punishes people for their poverty."

RENTAL CAR REIMBURSEMENT

This covers the cost of a rental car while your vehicle is being repaired. Rental car reimbursement is limited by dollar amount rather than time, so calculate to make sure you have enough insurance to cover at least a week or two in case the car needs a big repair. "The good news is that you can increase your coverage," says Divya Sangam, an insurance spokesperson at the consumer financial information website ValuePenguin. She recommends calling a few rental agencies in your area to get an idea of what daily and weekly rates are so that you can determine the coverage limit that's right for you.

UNINSURED MOTORIST COVERAGE

This protects you from having to pay for damage to your car and injuries to yourself and your passengers caused by someone who is uninsured. Without this coverage, you may end up having to take the uninsured motorist to court to recoup anything you spend to repair your car and for medical treatment related to the crash. According to Heller, 1 of every 10 crashes involves a motorist who doesn't have insurance. How much coverage do you need? Heller says it's a good idea to have the dollar amount of your uninsured motorist coverage equal that of your liability coverage.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY KIERSTEN ESSENPREIS

SPORTY CARS

BMW 2 Series Coupe

Thrilling to Drive, and Fuel-Efficient

79
OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 85

HIGHS Handling, braking, acceleration, fuel economy, fit and finish, front-seat comfort

LOWS Tight rear-seat room

POWERTRAIN 255-hp, 2.0-liter turbocharged 4-cylinder engine; 8-speed automatic transmission; rear-wheel drive

FUEL 31 mpg on premium

PRICE $36,350-$48,550 base price + $995 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $39,595

THE REDESIGNED 2 SERIES Coupe is a rear-wheel-drive thoroughbred that's a blast to drive, thanks to sharp handling and an energetic powertrain. It's impressively fuel-efficient, too. Think of it as a grown-up alternative to a Toyota GR86 or Volkswagen Golf GTI.

The 230i Coupe we tested proved a potent performer, with its 255-hp, turbo four-cylinder and smooth, quick-shifting eight-speed automatic. Power delivery is linear and punchy from low on the tachometer all the way to redline, and fuel economy is 31 mpg overall (albeit on required premium fuel). Switching the car to Sport mode makes for sharper shifts and a more thrilling engine and exhaust note.

We found BMW's little coupe to be taut, agile, and well-balanced on twisty roads and around our handling track. However, the steering is too vague, failing to transmit as much feedback about tire grip and road texture as a proper sporting machine should. This model doesn't beat you up like some sports cars, but the ride is far from plush, with large bumps noticeably jolting through.

The cabin is nicely finished and has a solid, well-built feel to it. It takes agility to get in and out of this low-slung coupe, and the center console hems the driver in a bit, but there is perfect symmetry between the pedals and left footrest. We found that the low seating position was better suited for taller drivers. The front seats have well-defined bolsters to hold you in place through corners, and they proved comfortable in spite of a lack of lumbar adjustment. The rear seat is very tight.

FCW, AEB with pedestrian detection, BSW, RCTW, LDW, and LKA come standard.

MIDSIZED SUVs

Jeep Grand Cherokee

Improved, but Still Middle of the Pack

64
OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 76

HIGHS Smooth powertrain, quietness, roomy cabin

LOWS Braking, some oddly designed controls

POWERTRAIN 293-hp, 3.6-liter V6 engine; 8-speed automatic transmission; four-wheel drive

FUEL 20 mpg on regular

PRICE $38,720-$74,300 base price + $1,795 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $50,590

THE NEWLY REDESIGNED Grand Cherokee is an improvement over the previous model, with a premium cabin and better fuel economy. Overall, it offers a more refined experience. Although we enjoyed driving this iconic midsized SUV, there are better options with higher road-test scores. Plus, the Jeep brand's typically below-average reliability should give shoppers pause.

The Grand Cherokee's core powertrain remains the same: a 293-hp V6 mated to a responsive and smooth-shifting eight-speed automatic. The Jeep takes off from a standstill without hesitation and makes quick work of two-lane passing zones. Fuel economy has improved by 2 mpg, but at just 20 mpg overall, it still lags behind most of its peers. A plug-in hybrid, which Jeep says has 25 miles of electric range, is available.

Handling is responsive for a relatively heavy and burly vehicle. The ride is firm, but the suspension is adept at absorbing bumps—whether on paved or gravel roads.

The quiet cabin is nicely finished with big swaths of wood trim, contrasting stitching, and a textured, jewel-like rotary gear selector. There's tons of space for the driver, and the front seats are comfortable. The flat rear seat is roomy, but it's short on leg support.

Some of the controls are cluttered and confusing, including the row of buttons on top of the center screen, along with the low, oddly angled climate controls. The information on the instrument cluster changes frequently, which can be distracting.

FCW, AEB with pedestrian detection, BSW, RCTW, LDW, LKA, and adaptive cruise control all come standard.

PHOTOS: JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS

Safety Term Glossary: AEB automatic emergency braking; **BSW** blind spot warning; **FCW** forward collision warning; **LDW** lane departure warning; **LKA** lane keeping assistance; **RCTW** rear cross traffic warning.

MIDSIZED SUVs

Kia Sorento Hybrid

A Good SUV Marred by Poor Reliability

47
OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 85

HIGHS Fuel economy, smoother ride than the gas-only Sorento

LOWS Hesitation accelerating out of rolling stops

POWERTRAIN 227-hp, 1.6-liter turbocharged 4-cylinder hybrid engine; 6-speed automatic transmission; all-wheel drive

FUEL 28 mpg on regular

PRICE $34,090-$48,090 base price + $1,255 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $40,975

THE HYBRID MODEL is the sweet spot within the Sorento lineup. It's a more pleasant vehicle than the gas-only version that we previously tested, with a smoother ride, a refined transmission, and better fuel economy. But even with its high road-test score, the hybrid still ranks on the low end in our midsized SUV ratings, due to well-below-average predicted reliability.

The hybrid's 28 mpg overall is impressive for a three-row SUV, but that's still 7 mpg behind the larger Toyota Highlander Hybrid. Also, the Sorento Hybrid has a noticeable delay when accelerating out of rolling stops. Still, we found that easier to put up with than the low-speed vibrations caused by the gas-only turbo Sorento's dual-clutch automatic transmission.

The hybrid version has more power than the base Sorento, and its six-speed automatic transmission shifts smoothly. The hybrid's cabin is slightly quieter than other Sorentos, especially when it's running in electric-only mode at lower speeds.

All versions of the Sorento, whether hybrid or otherwise, have wide and supportive front seats, suiting many body types. Higher trims, and all hybrid models, get comfy second-row captain's chairs, but this feature essentially makes the Sorento a four-seat SUV because the third row is too cramped for adults.

Most of the controls and the infotainment system are user-friendly, but the hybrid's electronic rotary gear selector can be tricky at first; it's easy to end up in Reverse when trying to find Park.

FCW, AEB with pedestrian detection, BSW, RCTW, LDW, and LKA all come standard on the two Sorento hybrid trims.

LUXURY COMPACT SUVs

Lexus NX350

Luxurious, but Annoying Controls

82
OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 79

HIGHS Fit and finish, short stopping distances

LOWS Annoying electronic door releases, unintuitive gear selector, visibility

POWERTRAIN 275-hp, 2.4-liter turbo 4-cylinder engine; 8-speed automatic transmission; AWD

FUEL 25 mpg on premium

PRICE $38,350-$57,400 base price + $1,075 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $47,765

THE REDESIGNED NX looks similar to the previous model, but beneath the surface there's a quicker, more fuel-efficient, and swankier vehicle. Even so, Lexus still hasn't managed to capture the engaging driving experience of the Audi Q5 and BMW X3, two main rivals.

We tested the NX350 with the 275-hp turbo four-cylinder. It offers competitively quick acceleration, and the eight-speed automatic upshifts smoothly. We were put off by the abrupt throttle delivery from a stop, some jolty downshifts, and the engine's gritty sound. At 25 mpg overall, the NX is one of the most frugal in the segment. We're currently testing a hybrid NX, which should offer even better fuel efficiency.

Quick steering makes the NX feel eager entering turns, but body roll sets in early. The ride is firm without being harsh, and we found it to be civilized in most situations.

The snug cabin has lots of soft surfaces and quality-feeling controls. Our drivers appreciated the well-placed armrests and large left footrest. The front seats are plush, with ample side bolstering. The rear seat is tight–particularly legroom for taller occupants–and cargo space is modest. The windows are small, and thick pillars compromise the rear views.

Lexus' infotainment system is now easier to use, though some common tasks require multiple steps. The gear selector is unintuitive–it's too easy to end up in Neutral when shifting from Reverse to Drive. And the electronic interior door releases are difficult to find at night.

FCW, AEB with pedestrian detection, BSW, RCTW, LDW, LKA, and adaptive cruise control come standard.

Safety Term Glossary: AEB automatic emergency braking; **BSW** blind spot warning; **FCW** forward collision warning; **LDW** lane departure warning; **LKA** lane keeping assistance; **RCTW** rear cross traffic warning.

Ratings › **Reliability Counts** The BMW 230i Coupe and Lexus NX350 top their segments, but reliability concerns hold back the Jeep Grand Cherokee and Kia Sorento Hybrid.

Make + Model	Overall Score	Survey Results		Road-Test Results												Active Safety Features			
		Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Road-test score	Overall mpg	Seat comfort, front/rear	Usability	Noise	Ride	Fit + finish	Routine handling	Avoidance-maneuver speed, mph	Acceleration, 0-60 mph, sec.	Dry braking, 60-0 mph, ft.	Suitcases + duffels/ Cargo volume, cu. ft.	FCW	AEB, pedestrian	AEB, highway	BSW
SPORTS CARS $25,000-$45,000																			
✓ **BMW 230i Coupe** 2.0T	79	●	▲▲	85	31	▲▲ / ▼▼	●	▲	●	▲	▲▲	56.0	6.4	128	2+1	S	S	O	S
✓ **Honda Civic Si** 1.5T	72	●	▲	74	32	▲ / ▲	▲▲	▼	▼	▲	▲▲	57.5	7.3	134	3+1	S	S	S	O
Volkswagen Golf GTI 2.0T	67	▼	▲	85	28	▲ / ●	▼▼	▲	●	▲	▲▲	56.0	6.4	127	1+3	S	S	S	S
Mini Cooper S 2.0T	65	▼	●	80	30	▲ / ▼▼	●	●	●	▲	▲▲	56.0	7.2	130	1+1	S	S	–	–
SUVs $35,000-$45,000																			
✓ **Toyota Highlander** 3.5L	88	▲▲	▲	86	22	▲ / ▲▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	●	50.0	7.3	132	41.0	S	S	S	O
✓ **Toyota Highlander** 2.5H	87	▲▲	▲	84	35	▲ / ▲▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	49.5	8.0	141	41.0	S	S	S	O
✓ **Toyota Venza** 2.5H	83	▲▲	▲	75	37	▲ / ▲	▼	▲	▲	▲	▲	51.0	7.8	137	26.5	S	S	S	S
✓ **Chevrolet Blazer** 3.6L	82	▲	●	83	19	▲ / ▲	▲▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	54.5	6.4	130	34.5	S	S	O	O
✓ **Nissan Murano** 3.5L	81	▲	●	77	21	▲ / ▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	●	50.5	7.7	131	33.5	S	S	S	S
✓ **Ford Edge** 2.0T	80	●	●	84	22	▲ / ▲▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	52.0	7.7	129	39.0	S	S	S	S
✓ **Honda Passport** 3.5L	76	●	▼	79	21	▲ / ▲	▲	▲	●	▲	●	53.5	6.4	135	39.0	S	S	S	S
Jeep Grand Cherokee 3.6L	64	▼	▲	76	20	▲ / ▲	●	▲	▲	▲	●	51.5	7.8	138	36.0	S	S	S	S
Hyundai Santa Fe 1.6T+H	64	▼	●	86	30	▲ / ▲▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	51.0	8.3	130	35.5	S	S	S	S
Hyundai Santa Fe 2.5L	58	▼	●	76	24	▲ / ▲▲	▲	●	●	▲	▲	54.5	10.0	126	35.5	S	S	S	S
Kia Sorento 1.6T+H	47	▼▼	●	85	28	▲ / ▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	53.0	8.1	132	39.5	S	S	S	O
Kia Sorento 2.5T	46	▼▼	●	83	25	▲ / ▲	▲▲	▲	●	▲	▲	52.5	6.5	133	39.5	S	S	S	O
2-ROW SUVs $45,000-$55,000																			
✓ **Lexus NX350** 2.4T	82	▲	▲	79	25	▲ / ▲	▼	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	53.5	7.2	127	26.5	S	S	S	S
✓ **BMW X3** 2.0T	81	●	●	92	24	▲▲ / ▲	●	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲	50.5	7.7	128	32.0	S	S	O	S
✓ **Audi Q5** 2.0T	79	▲	●	83	24	▲ / ▲	●	▲	▲	▲	▲	52.5	6.8	130	27.0	S	S	O	S
✓ **Mercedes-Benz GLC300** 2.0T	78	▲	▼	79	22	▲▲ / ▲	▼▼	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	50.0	6.8	132	28.0	S	S	S	S
✓ **Volvo XC60** 2.0T	78	▲	●	79	23	▲▲ / ▲	▼	▲	●	▲▲	▲	52.0	8.0	124	34.0	S	S	S	S
✓ **Infiniti QX50** 2.0T	72	●	▼▼	77	22	▲ / ▲	▼	▲	●	▲▲	●	55.5	7.2	129	30.5	S	S	S	S
✓ **Acura RDX** 2.0T	71	●	▼	82	22	▲▲ / ▲	▼	▲	●	▲	▲	52.0	7.0	127	33.0	S	S	S	S
Genesis GV70 2.5T	64	▼	▲	82	24	▲▲ / ▲	▼▼	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	54.5	7.5	135	27.5	S	S	S	S

› Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at CR.org/cars. When you're ready to buy, configure the vehicle and find the best price in your area by clicking the green "View Pricing Information" button on the model's dedicated page.

HOW WE TEST: Recommended models did well in our **Overall Score,** which factors in **road-test results, predicted reliability, owner satisfaction,** and **advanced safety,** which includes crash-test results and the availability of crash-prevention features, such as forward collision warning, automatic emergency braking, pedestrian detection, and blind spot warning. A dash (–) means no such safety system is offered; O means that it's optional on at least some trim levels; S means that the feature is standard on all trims. We deduct points if a model's gear selector lacks fail-safes to prevent the vehicle from rolling away.

▼▼ ▼ ● ▲ ▲▲ WORSE – BETTER | ✓ RECOMMENDED | GREEN CHOICE

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Wine, boxed ... Jul 22, 13

Summer's Gone Wild

It's a little scary out there this time of year.

Those Deer Are Everywhere

Lock up your house and garage. Bambi has plans to hang out.

Submitted by Kari Little-McKinney, via email

More Effective Than a Guard Dog?

We have no interest in trespassing on this property.

Submitted by Marcia Lukon, Charlestown, RI

Take It Outside, Please

When it comes to these fireworks, it's best not to follow the display's directions.

Submitted by Jeanette Rockers, via email

CORRECTION

HOT DOGS

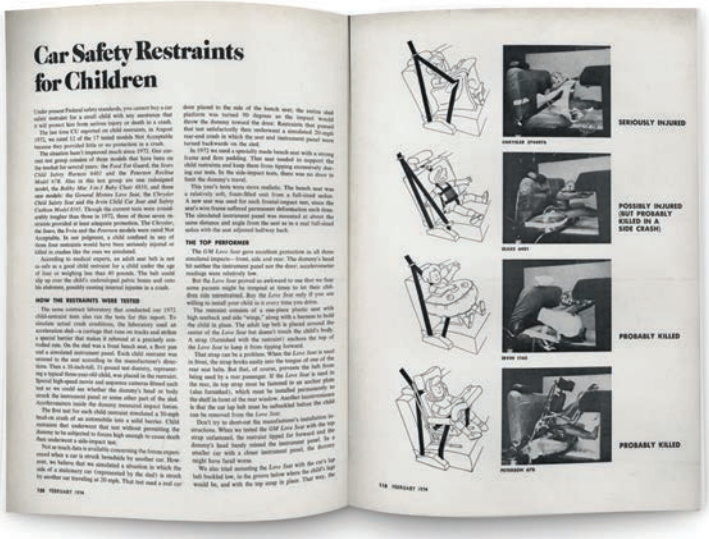
BEEF FRANKFURTERS

An item in the June 2022 Selling It column showed a photo of a retail grocery display of Stahl-Meyer Hot Dogs (above, left) behind a misplaced sign advertising a different product, Stahl-Meyer Beef Frankfurters (above, right). Stahl-Meyer Beef Frankfurters are made with 100% beef, and Consumer Reports did not intend to suggest otherwise. Consumer Reports apologizes to Stahl-Meyer and its customers for any confusion.

SHARE

Be on the lookout for goofs and glitches like these. Share them with us—by email at **SellingIt@cro.consumer.org** or by mail to Selling It, Consumer Reports, 101 Truman Ave., Yonkers, NY 10703—and we might publish yours. Please include key information, such as your name and location.

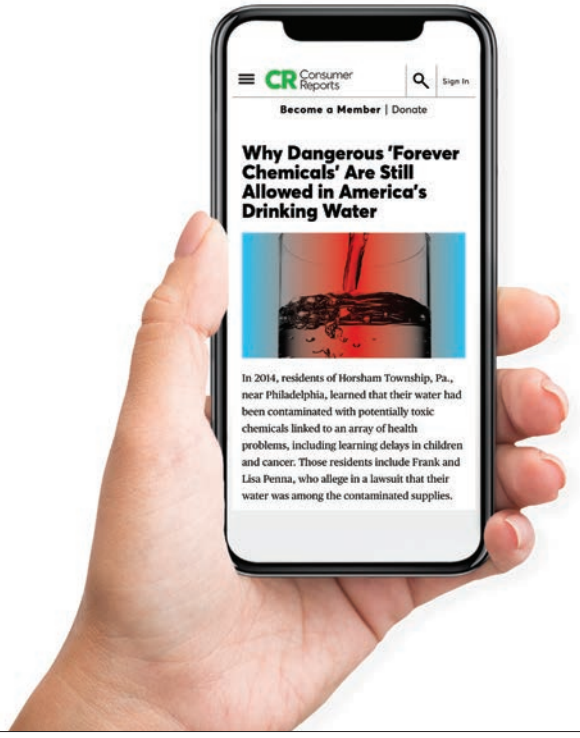
1974


Car Safety Restraints for Children
SERIOUSLY INJURED
POSSIBLY INJURED (BUT PROBABLY KILLED IN A SIDE CRASH)
PROBABLY KILLED
PROBABLY KILLED

On Your Side—Then & Now

Everyday decisions are more important than ever. From navigating a health crisis to buying a car or making safe food choices, you can rely on the trusted expertise of CR. But we can't do it without you. Your contributions provide us with the additional support that makes our nonprofit work possible.

2022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Why Dangerous 'Forever Chemicals' Are Still Allowed in America's Drinking Water
In 2014, residents of Horsham Township, Pa., near Philadelphia, learned that their water had been contaminated with potentially toxic chemicals linked to an array of health problems, including learning delays in children and cancer. Those residents include Frank and Lisa Penna, who allege in a lawsuit that their water was among the contaminated supplies.

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